

# **The Old World is Behind You**

The Situationists and beyond in  
contemporary anarchistic currents

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# **Abstract**

## **The Old World is Behind You**

### **The Situationists and beyond in contemporary anarchistic currents and milieux**

This thesis focuses on a sphere of contemporary anarchism in which the ideas of the Situationists have found influence. It foregrounds the oppositional impulse underpinning the lived worlds of these milieux, and the symbolic representations used in their aims, ideals and responses to the realities they confront. One of the key sources of primary evidence will therefore be independently published texts. Writing and publishing are important interventions in the activities which constitute the broader anarchist movement, forming an essential background to the post-Situationist interventions, mainly periodicals, which are the main focus of the thesis.

The Situationists, a group of radicals active, in the 1950s and 1960s, who developed a critique of everyday life, of commodity culture and of hierarchy and power, form the central theme connecting the range of interventions explored. The discussion includes a consideration of May 68, in which the Situationists participated, and the wall writing of May 68, which reflects the Situationist influence and which expresses an alternative reality and reclaimed public space.

The Situationists, and May 68, form the focus of two other themes. Firstly, the past as a repository of ideas, transmitting the means of an oppositional impulse over time. Secondly, the way in which a sense of community is constituted not just synchronically but diachronically.

Another key argument is that the 'oppositional impulse' arises not only through rational, intellectual and cognitive thought, but also on an emotional level – as a response to and reaction against the system. Situationist texts are analysed for their power, through lyrical poetic writing, in evoking a critical response to everyday life.

The thesis selects post-Situationist periodicals and interventions, 1980s-1990s, and explores their histories, those involved in their production, the use of the past as a repository of ideas, inspirations and influences, and the debates that emerge through such interventions.

The thesis aims to evoke and convey, with richness and texture, the ideas and critical perspectives of the milieux and interventions explored. It aims, through an explication of Situationist and post-Situationist anarchistic ideas, combined with ethnographic descriptions derived through 'observant participation', to capture something of the ethos of the lived worlds of the spheres discussed

It is argued that these elements tend to be overlooked in 'new social movement' (NSM) accounts of oppositional currents. A range of anthropological literature is also evaluated to clarify the perspectives informing this thesis, which aims for an egalitarian research method.

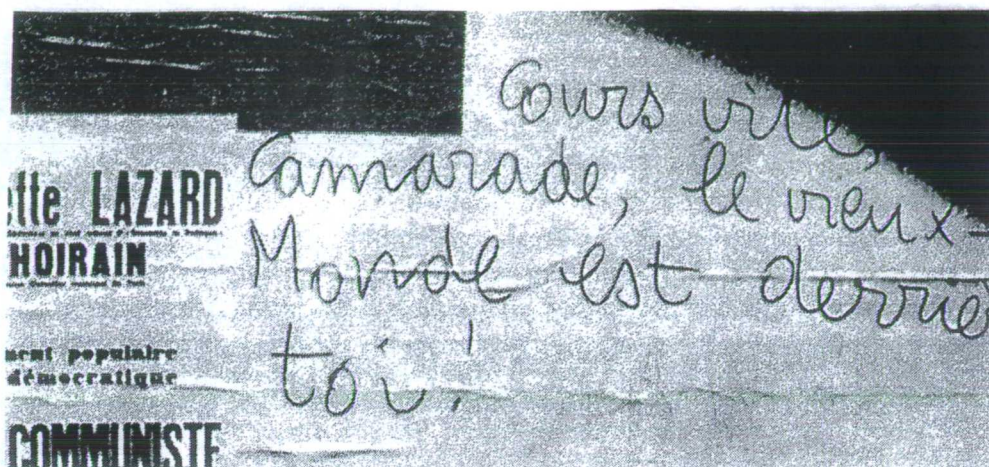


Photo acknowledgement: Vienet 1992 p.120

'Cours vite, camarade, le vieux monde  
est derriere toi!'

'Move quickly, comrade,  
the old world is behind you!'

Wall writing, Situationist-derived,  
Paris, May 68

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In this 'Paradigms Lost' route map, Paris occupies a central place, with May 68, the Commune, Situationists Debord and Vaneigem, council communist Pannekoek, libertarian socialist Castoriadis, ecological (post) Marxist Andre Gorz, post-structuralist Baudrillard. Non-French cities are outside in the 'banlieu' (suburbs). Foucault, Barthes and Sartre are consigned to a 'dead-end' cemetery, Derrida to an 'area under deconstruction'. An anarchist section has Emma (Goldman's) all-night dancing (after her often quoted proclamation that it was not her revolution if she could not dance). Marxists are in 'Marxville'. Shipwrecks of the S.I. (Situationist International) 1972, and S ou B (Socialisme ou Barbarie) 1964. More contemporary citations are primitivist writer Zerzan, *Fifth Estate*, and office-work mag. *Processed World* (From *Anarchy* (see Chapter 10) Winter 1990)

**Page 27**

Like most anarchists, I suspect, we feel that all repression is "surplus repression" and that repression has always been "obsolets" for anyone who has desired to live freely. But more fundamentally, we have a great respect for the importance of personal and social integrity to our lives. Before people can be very free, they must achieve some sort of self-integration. In a relatively free society (e.g. "primitive communities") this is a fairly "natural occurrence" in our own extremely administered and slavish society, unfortunately, it is rare. Social alienation and alienation from nature are so taken-for-granted, that even many anarchists overlooked the fundamental importance of overcoming such alienation, or the implications of this kind of struggle. So it isn't too surprising that, in the absence of any wholeness or integrity in personal and community life people do allow themselves to be treated as machines for "human resources" in the language of the administrators.) Many even come to see themselves as no more than machinery in the service of whichever gods they end up serving. That the "ethos" of narrowly-conceived "self-





# Contents

## Introduction 1

- 1 **Oppositional currents and the art of anthropology 4**  
A personal account: critique, anarchy, conviviality 5; A critique of the reification of sociological categories and new social movement approaches 10; An evaluation of anthropology 19
- 2 **Anarchy in the UK: anarchistic currents 35**  
The use of the past 36; A brief history 37, Anarchism defined 38, The anarchist book fair: an ethnographic description 40; Festival: Anarchy in the UK, October 1994; Anarchists as outsiders 47; Initial conduits to an anarchist perspective 49; 51; Creating social relations 53; Play, pleasure, symbolic expression in action 54; The role of texts 56; Periodicals 60
- 3 **The Situationists and May 68 62**  
'Les paves' (Sous les paves, la plage) 68; Shops and cars as targets 69; Wall writing and slogans 70; Situationist themes in the wall writing 74; The aftermath; An encounter with the Situationists (Hayes) 79; Violence and danger 82
- 4 **Poetry without poems: Situationist texts as a lyrical legacy 86**  
Vaneigem's Revolution of Everyday Life 90; Debord's society of the spectacle 93; "You can't live like that" 98
- 5 **The oppositional impulse: French post-Situationists after May 68 100**  
Capitalist colonisation 100; From theory to practise 102; Activism and organisation 104; Beyond leftism 105
- 6 **The Situationists and beyond: post-Situationist milieux 107**  
The term 'milieu' 108, Pro-situs 109; Critical clerics 111; Rivalries and feuds 112; The aesthetic legacy 112; Anarchist context 113; The origins of megalomania 115; King Mob 115; Emotional dimensions 120, Art gallery collaborations 121; Launches 122
- 7 **Anti Clock-wise to Away With All Cars 125**  
Biography, class consciousness 126, Situationist influence 129, Visual images 131; A debate on nihilism 132; A discussion on violence 138, Sexuality 139, The car as a target 140; Away With All Cars 141
- 8 **Here and Now 145**  
Glasgow's anarchist tradition 146, Biographies. Scotland 146, Leeds 147; Shared agendas 148; Conviviality 149, Conviviality and autonomy 150; Situationist influence 151; The Political Personality 153, Riots 156, Wider circles 160
- 9 **Popular culture and parody as style 164**  
Tom Vague and *Vague* 165, Popular/high culture, sensation, transgression 168, Stewart Home 169. Class issues 171, A furious attack on the myth of the total revolutionary critique 172, Feuds 174; Historification 175, Irony and ambiguity 176
- 10 **Anarchy in the USA 179**  
Origins 179, Readers and letters 181, Critical theory 182, Anarchy, religion, the sacred and the symbolic: a debate 185; Situationist influence 192; Postmodernism 195, Primitivism 197

- 11 Primitivism, a critique of civilization and *Fifth Estate* 200**  
From underground left to anti-civilization 200, John Zerzan 204, Fredy Perlman 205; Bob Brubaker 208; Civilization and its tolls 208, Anti-technology, anti-civilization 209, Stone age economics 211, 'Against the megamachine' 211; Indigenism reclaimed 213, Situationist influences 215

- 12 The legacy of the Situationists in anti-capitalist and activist currents 224**  
Radical environmentalism 225, Claremont Road 'No M11' protest 227, Symbolic and cultural actions and Situationist influence 230; Anti-capitalism 231; June 18, 1999 232, Reflections on J18 232; Symbolic actions – Situationist themes explored 235; Pink and Silver bloc 235; The Black Bloc 237 Play 238; Subjectivity 241; Disrupting routines 241

**Conclusions 243**

Texts as a focus for conveying the lived world of oppositional currents 244

**Appendix: Methodology and Primary Sources 251**

A convivial research approach 251, 'Observant participation' 251, Primary material 254; Research ethics 255, Issues raised 256; Selecting material 257; Postscript 258; Time period involved 258

**Bibliography 260**

## Illustrations

‘Cours vite, camarade, le vieux monde est derriere toi’ (Run, comrade, the old world is behind you) iii

A ‘map’ reflecting on past and contemporary components in the world of Anarchy (*Anarchy* Winter 1990) iv

‘Sous les pavés, la plage’ (Under the paving stones, the beach) Wall writing Paris May 1968 69a

Cover of *Anti Clock-wise* 4: ‘Commodity Fetishism & the Dominant Culture are draining my will to live...’ 125a

Page from *Anti Clock-wise* 4 showing detournement of Cliff Richard “I’d just finished signing autographs..” 125b

Page from *No*, Turner’s second series of zines, (this one unnumbered), ‘Inspirational Class War’ 125c

Page from *No* unnumbered, showing detournement: ‘Turn your cash into unwanted household items’ 130a

Page from *Anti Clock-wise* 12 showing detournement: “Look, Cindy, men competing...” 130b

Cover of *Here and Now* 5 showing the British Library, after being bombed in World War II 145a

Cover of *Vague* featuring a photograph (Situationist-derived) of molotov cocktails 164a

Cover of *Smile* featuring the same photograph of molotov cocktails as used in *Vague* 164b

Cover of *Anarchy* featuring collage of woman leaping and a clock 179a

Cover of *Fifth Estate* showing quote from Surrealist Artaud 200a

Cover of *SchQUALL*, an anthology of two independent news sources, Schnews and Squall, showing photographs of the Day of Global Action, June 18, 1999 in London, and an action against genetically modified crops 238a

*Financial Crimes*, a newspaper produced by Reclaim the Streets, London, as a spoof of the *Financial Times*. It was printed on the same pink paper 239a

Statue of Winston Churchill detourned to punk with turf mohican

‘His finest hour!’ flyer for Anarchist Book Fair October 2000 239b

On Active Distribution catalogue 2000 239c

## Introduction: The Situationists and beyond

This thesis focuses on the legacy of the Situationists, a radical group, active in the 1950s and 1960s, who developed a critique of everyday life, hierarchy and commodity culture. The interventions discussed derive from a sphere of anarchism over the last few decades.

Symbolic expressions of anti-capitalist 'carnival' in the late 1990s and 00s have been regularly represented in the media. Now familiar images, selected by both mainstream and activist media, range from the padded white overalls, cardboard 'armour' and inflated 'weapons', of the Italian Tute Bianche (White Overalls Movement) and London-based Wombles; and pink fairies alongside a samba band; to prominent politicians pelted with custard pies. The ethos is one of play and pleasure, humour and symbolism – an opposition expressed not through orthodox political protest (marches, petitions, letters to government), but through cultural forms and direct action. Both Situationist and anarchist expressions of subversion disrupt the routines of everyday life through carnivalesque (see Goaman forthcoming 2003; see also Chapter 12 for further discussion).

As consumer culture bites deeper and industrial capitalism colonizes further into every sphere of life, the ideas of the Situationists have gained in relevance and resonance. Their writings, drawing on Marx, anarchism, and emerging from an avant garde tradition, present a critique of the totality, of everyday life, commodity culture and the 'society of the spectacle'. Their texts are one of the most important 20<sup>th</sup> century influences on anarchism, and an understanding of this is essential in grasping the ethos of contemporary anarchistic movements. The legacy of the Situationists, as absorbed into anarchism, is analysed in relation to anti-globalisation and radical environmental movements in Chapter 12.

Anarchistic ideas, with their do-it-yourself ethic, and their anti-capitalist and non-hierarchical principles, have assumed a high profile with the resurgence of direct action in the 1990s UK anti-roads movement and radical environmentalists of Earth First!; and secondly in the anti-capitalist/anti globalisation movement from the late 1990s. David Graeber, Yale anthropologist and founder of the Anti-Capitalist Convergence, sees anarchism as 'the heart of the [anti-globalisation] movement, its soul; the source of most of what's new and hopeful about it' (Graeber 2002 p 62)

To those unfamiliar with radical milieux, eruptions, such as the anti-globalisation movement, appear to come from nowhere. In reality, the libertarian oppositional currents – ranging from anti-nuclear to peace to environmental to anarchist – which are active in such resurgences have been engaged in their projects of transformation, less visibly, for decades earlier (see, for example, Welsh 2000). Though largely unnoticed by the mainstream media, anarchist currents have continued their interventions, disseminating critiques, points of contact, action and discussion for a network of individuals across the world. Anarchist ideas are propounded mostly through self-organised, self-funded and sometimes self-published texts.

The broader anarchist movement forms an important background to the post-Situationist interventions analysed, and an ethnographically-oriented account of anarchist currents, mainly in the UK, is included in Chapter 2, which aims to convey the lived world of anarchism. This sense of a lived experiential world also emerges in the account of post Situationist milieux (Chapter 6) and the analyses of periodicals in the UK and USA (*Anti Clockwise*, *Here and Now*, *Vague*, *Anarchy: a journal of desire armed*, and *Fifth Estate*), projects which have been informed by a familiarity with Situationist ideas

This thesis presents an account of a sphere of anarchism in which Situationist ideas have found influence. My account is enriched by ethnography, through my method of ‘observant participation’, an inversion of ‘participant observation’, the traditional method deriving from anthropology. The inversion is intended to emphasise the researcher’s role as participant rather than observer.

This thesis also foregrounds the ideas informing such anarchistic currents. It therefore aims to capture the ethos of such currents, and of what is termed the ‘oppositional impulse’ informing these milieux. This is derived through analyses of the symbolic representations – as texts and print – which are used in their aims, ideals and responses to the realities they confront. One of the key sources of evidence will therefore be independently published texts. Writing and publishing are important aspects of the range of interventions which constitute the broader anarchist movement.

The central theme connecting the range of interventions explored in this thesis is the Situationists. An account of May 68, is included because it is a key moment of their influence in active interventions. The role of the wall writing in Paris in May 68, in communicating and constituting an alternative reality as the events unfolded, is explored, and key Situationist themes are identified. To my knowledge, such an analysis has not been undertaken before. My primary material for this task was readily found in anarchist currents (at the annual Anarchist Book Fair in London, 1990, I purchased a second-hand book, written in French shortly after May 68 and published the same year, with slogans from wall writing and posters collected by Julien Besancon). This is one small example illustrating the strong interconnections between the Situationists and anarchism.

The Situationists, and May 68, and the analysis of post-Situationist interventions, form the focus also of several other central themes. Firstly, I argue that the past, archived and remembered through texts, acts as a repository of ideas, transmitting oppositional ideas to subsequent generations, and communicating an evocation of the oppositional impulse. The past, remembered through writing, is a resource from which radicals learn, and draw inspiration and influence

Secondly this ‘oppositional impulse’ arises not only through rational, intellectual and cognitive thought, but also on an emotional level – experienced as an emotional impulse reacting against everyday life as determined by the totality of the modern consumer capitalist

system. Situationist texts are analysed for their power to evoke a critical response to everyday life, through lyrical poetic writing. In the case of the Situationist Raoul Vaneigem's texts, it is to subjectivity that his writing appeals, evoking a distaste with the lived world as constituted by modern capitalism.

Thirdly, writing in print – the texts that form a key element in anarchist interventions – is explored for its ability not only to transmit ideas but as a means of creating a sense of community over time, diachronically, and over space, synchronically, between radicals otherwise separated by distance. Texts as artefacts, and writing as symbolic representation, play a key role in connecting radicals to others in the present, in the past and in the future.

Projects informed by Situationist ideas, mainly periodicals in the period 1980s-1990s, are explored in terms of their histories, the individuals involved in their production, and the ideas, debates, and sometimes tensions, that emerge from them. The aim is to evoke, with richness, and through the interplay of dialogue as text, the ethos, ideas and critical perspectives of the milieux and interventions analysed.

It is argued that the elements identified above tend to be overlooked in some studies in the fields of new social movement theory, selected texts from which are evaluated, alongside a range of anthropological literature, in order to clarify further the aims and methods of this thesis. The perspectives underpinning these aspire to a participatory and convivial form of thesis research that aims to transcend the role-division of academic and researcher, to construct a more egalitarian encounter between *persons*, rather than that between academic and subject/object of study. This is explored in Chapter 1, and my methodology is documented in the Appendix.

It is argued that an awareness of the motivations behind research and academic writing is important, and that such endeavours need to be motivated by an engagement with the task of transformation: to recognise and oppose the historical, political and economic processes, and the social relations that construct them, that threaten the biospheric support for humans and other lifeforms. The impact of these processes intensifies as capitalism, or empire as it is sometimes now referred to (Watson c.1990s; Negri and Hardt 2001), seeks to control and exploit peoples and their environments further. Academia, rather than retreating further into specialised discourse, can contribute in some way to averting the global crisis now facing us.

As these social and economic processes colonise every sphere of life with consumer culture, with the privatization and commodification of all the elements necessary to life, the work of the Situationists is more relevant than ever, and it is anarchist currents which have foregrounded their ideas in their interventions. This counter process – an oppositional movement that contests modern capitalism and hierarchy in its totality of effects – is the subject of this thesis.



## Chapter 1

### Oppositional currents and the art of anthropology

This thesis focuses on contemporary radical anarchistic currents, which have drawn on the legacy of the Situationists. Anarchism, and its focus on self-organised publishing and distribution of anarchist and Situationist texts, forms an important background to the material considered, and is the subject of the next chapter. An account of the Situationists and of May 68, in which Situationist ideas fell on fertile ground, follows, and the subsequent chapters explore Situationist texts and post-Situationist milieux and texts, mainly periodicals.

This chapter begins with a personal account of my own involvement in anarchist and post-Situationist currents. It considers the libertarian current within anthropology, and moves to an extensive critical evaluation of texts, both sociological and anthropological, in order to clarify my own perspectives and as part of my search for an egalitarian anthropological approach.

The argument begins with an evaluation of three texts, broadly within the sphere of new social movement (NSM) theory, by Melucci, Wall and Boggs. The texts by Melucci and Boggs were selected for discussion since some anarchist academics have found them relevant to a theory of contemporary anarchism or environmental activism. Wall's text has been selected as interesting since Wall himself was a participant in environmental groups.

My critiques of these texts are intended to highlight my own differences with their approaches. My evaluations also help clarify my aim of a more egalitarian research method, in which 'subjects' are related to and written about as persons, rather than being overly absorbed into reified sociological categories such as 'social movements', 'actors', or 'collective behaviour' (something Melucci (1996) warns against).

My argument centres on the tendency in such texts to neglect <sup>1</sup> the ideas and texts produced by the movement, thereby losing the richer textuality of written discourse, polemic and rhetoric which forms a material and symbolic interconnection between those involved in radical currents. I emphasise the way in which oppositional currents are constituted as the enactment, with communicative and collective intersections, of what I have referred to as the 'oppositional impulse', a response to and reaction against the existing world and its conditions. It is this 'oppositional impulse' that helps create the ethos of an oppositional current, and the critical ideas that emerge from the experience of this response to existing conditions are most clearly expressed in the written word, in print, in the communications which form an important activity in the anarchistic currents which are the focus of this thesis. A conventional ethnography, in

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<sup>1</sup> More recent texts, such as Welsh 2000, have addressed texts produced by the movements studied, in this case the anti nuclear movement.

which the critical responses to the world would emerge as a more secondary phenomenon, for example through fragments of participants' texts and through interview and 'observational' material, would not convey adequately the ethos of anarchistic currents. Hence the focus on periodicals in Chapters 7-11 of this thesis.

Oppositional texts, often produced independently of mainstream commercial networks, in a self-organised do-it-yourself culture, also help form a sense of community in a modern world in which those attracted to radical ideas may otherwise find themselves relatively isolated and marginalised. This is explored particularly in Chapter 2, when the role of texts in the anarchist movement is discussed. Secondly, texts form a repository of past ideas and the use of the past in inspiring and informing future generations of radicals tend to be overly neglected in the new social movement (NSM) texts evaluated. My thesis focuses on the legacy of the Situationists in anarchistic currents, and Chapters 3-4 consider the Situationists, May '68 and key Situationist texts. Thirdly, as introduced above, NSM texts tend to neglect the lived experiential world of the radical currents studied, and therefore convey little of the 'ethos' and guiding 'oppositional impulse' of radical currents. This is explored particularly in Chapters 7-12.

My evaluation of anthropological texts considers a variety of approaches, particularly postmodern and feminist perspectives, in order to clarify further my own perspectives on the importance of an egalitarian research method that relates to 'subjects' as persons. And also to argue for the essential motivational component, in academic research and writing, of a political engagement with the crisis of our age and the processes that threaten the biosphere, humans and other lifeforms. To refer to an old adage of Marx, philosophers have merely interpreted the world, the point is to change it.

Before turning to my evaluation of selected new social movement texts and a range of anthropological texts, I want to contextualise my own place in the currents which are the focus of this thesis.

### **A personal account: critique anarchy, conviviality**

My motivation in my research and writing stems from my own sense that anarchistic and post-situationist currents offer important critical ideas, debates and insights. While minor elements of anarchism's critique of power relations correspond with both feminist and poststructuralist theorists, the guiding principles of anarchism tend to be marginalised, despite a thriving 'imagined community' of adherents. Anarchists are generally critical of partial 'single issue' and 'identity politics' stances such as have been thrown up by the early studies of 'new social movements' (eg. studies of anti-nuclear and women's movements, eg. Melucci 1989; Boggs 1985). Anarchist guiding principles might be summed up as the following a critique of capitalism, of the state and the idea of government, and of hierarchical organisation, and a belief

in the capacity of humans to cooperate, via mutual associations (hence Kropotkin's notion of 'mutual aid'), and to organise for their own lives without the need for a higher authority. Anarchists look to both primitive societies (though generally with some criticism) and to moments in recent history (Kronstadt, anarchist organisation in the Spanish Civil War, Hungary 1956) for evidence of the ability of humans to organise themselves.

I will describe briefly my own discovery of anarchism, and related currents of situationist, primitivist and radical communist (or ultra-leftist) theory, in order to situate my own relationship to them.

It was only looking back on my childhood that I began to appreciate the extent to which alternative perspectives on the world were obscured from me. Though my grandfather on my mother's side was J.B. Priestley, renowned for his writing and for his involvement in founding the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the more radical and libertarian perspectives taken up by my grandfather were obscured from us as grandchildren. My parents never discussed them. In 1994 Colin Ward celebrated J.B. Priestley's centenary with an account of 'Priestley's belated anarchism' (*Freedom* 15.10.94 p.5). Ward explored Priestley's anarchistic critiques of power, the machinery of authority, and the state as the war-making instrument, and his call for mutual help and voluntary associations in his embrace of a gentle anarchism. I want to quote Priestley's words on this at length, since it forms for me a significant statement of how anti-authoritarian ideas even when held by those in the same family, can be marginalised and obscured. Priestley explained in two radio talks in November 1954:

"I have called us anarchists because we distrust and dislike the power systems, the immense machinery of authority, believing that men would do better to rely on mutual help and voluntary associations. I have called us the *gentle* anarchists because we have no desire to use violence and have no intention of throwing bombs. We are not members of an organised group, but simply a number of people who are beginning to think along certain lines. ...

"In no country have the people in general ever demanded atomic warfare, biological and chemical warfare, and all the other horrors; their opinion has never been asked. It is governments and not people that have created these nightmares....the state is the war-making instrument, the machine that automatically creates dangerous situations. If everywhere in the world were busy weakening this instrument, cutting down the machine, then we could be moving away from war. but in fact we are always elaborating the instrument, strengthening the machine, giving the state more and more power, offering it precious civic liberties that our forefathers had to fight for.'" (ibid.)

On the mass media, Priestley's critiques overlap with those of the Situationists in its impact on the mass media in destroying zest, imagination, joy and awe:

“[The mass media] are too big, too noisy, too costly, too complicated in their elaborate techniques and machinery, too impersonal. And at their worst, when deliberately exploited for an ignoble purpose, they subordinate genuine personality to the mass mind and mass values, producing more and more regimentation in political, social and cultural life. Wrongly used, to serve power, political or financial, and catching and holding, as they do, vast numbers of the young, they tend to create a passive-minded public unwillingness to make the slightest effort...A society might offer a wonderland of mechanical marvels and yet fail disastrously because it consists of people who are losing their zest, imagination, joy and awe and are filled with boredom and melancholy and begin to think and act more like slaves than like free men. Here, in the instruments of power which threaten personality itself, is the danger. We must face it while we still have the wits to recognise that it is a danger.” (ibid.)

As a young teenager, I had a vague and only half comprehended awareness of a critique of modern life, garnered not from my grandfather, who I knew for his warmth and the compassionate tone of his plays and writings but not for his more radical perspectives, but from diverse sources. Initially these included the hippy counterculture of the 1960s. My own experience of this was limited to a countercultural expression through clothing styles (such as wearing no shoes in London streets), and encounters with some of the more political critiques, for example one in slogan form – painted in huge letters alongside the Metropolitan tube line, underneath the Westway, in west London; the slogan read SAME THING DAY AFTER DAY – TUBE WORK DINER WORK TUBE ARMCHAIR TV SLEEP TUBE WORK – HOW MUCH MORE CAN YOU TAKE – ONE IN TEN GO MAD – ONE IN FIVE CRACKS UP. Over twenty years later I was to find out that this was written up by King Mob, a group with links to the Situationists (a photograph of the slogan appears in BM Blob *Once upon a time...*).

During the 1970s, I was sympathetic to the growing interest in ‘self-sufficiency’ and rural smallholdings (which had an impact on mainstream culture with widely selling books such as by John Seymour’s *Practical Guide to Self-sufficiency*).

My own political consciousness arose in a more explicit form out of the anti-nuclear/peace, ecology and third world issue movements of the early 1980s, when I was involved in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and ecological groups, (and it was only at this time that the part played by my grandfather in forming CND began to become clearer). My ideas at this time were informed by currents such as Permaculture, the radical alternative magazine *Undercurrents* and *The Ecologist*, the growing organic farming movement and the newly formed Ecology Party; and third world fair trade movements, the World Development Movement and magazines concerned with third world exploitation such as *New Internationalist*. I became increasingly interested in anthropological knowledge of primitive societies as one source from which to develop a critique of the modern Western capitalist world, and in 1984 I began a degree in anthropology. (As an anthropology student, I found that the ethnographies

that I had been reading on gathering hunting societies, for example by Turnbull (1961) and Lee (1976; 1979), which were imbued with a radical critique of the contemporary West which manifested itself in the 1960s counterculture, were not held in high regard!). My motivation throughout my undergraduate course was a search for my own critical perspectives. I expanded these by connecting up aspects of early Marx (the more humanistic elements of Marx's early work rather than the Althusserian version which was still influential in academia in the mid-1980s); theory which fused psychoanalytic theory with cultural critique (Wilhelm Reich Herbert Marcuse (1955; 1964) and R.D.Laing; post-structuralist theorists such as Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari; and anarchism (which featured in a course on Mediterranean anthropology covering Spain at the time of the Spanish Civil War).

In 1987, when I was finishing my degree, I came across some texts, which I would now characterise as post-Situationist, from the fringes of the anarchist movement. This took my interest in marginal anarchist texts further, and I began seeking out others from radical bookshops such as Freedom and Compendium in London. I was intrigued by their critiques of the totality of contemporary life, which were more far-reaching and radical than those I had encountered before (though I noted that the ecological dimension was not well developed in some spheres), and the ethos of opposition to hierarchical relations. I was struck too by the rich strand of do-it-yourself texts and interventions, which was the ethos put into practice. From this interest grew my participation, and participatory 'convivial' thesis research – convivial here denoting my desire to meet people and converse with them under the usual auspices of social interaction, with hospitality at my or the other's home, or in pubs or cafes. See the appendix for more on my methodology.

### **Anthropology and libertarian currents**

This thesis presents a challenge to both traditional and postmodern approaches to research and the anthropological method of 'participant observation'. My methodological approach has involved a jettisoning of the concept of 'fieldwork' (with all its colonialist and imperialist associations), and an inversion of the traditional method of 'participant observation', in favour of what has been rather 'observant participation' - by myself taking the role not merely as researcher, academic and PhD student but as one engaged with the movement primarily as an interested and relatively active participator in the currents involved. My ethnography of (post-Situationist) texts, particularly periodicals, allows me to explicate the meanings of the currents involved in their production. My aim has been to take up a relationship of equality to these currents, and, in understanding them on their own terms, to draw out their richness and value.

While anthropology does not have a distinctly anarchist strand in terms of methodology, a libertarian current can be identified. On the one hand there are the contributions from libertarian Marxists, notably Stanley Diamond (1974), and the editorial group of the journal *Critique of*

*Anthropology.* The anthropologist Brian Morris, Professor of Anthropology at Goldsmith's College, London University, and an avowed libertarian socialist, has written extensively on anarchist thinkers and issues (c1993; 1993a). Harold Barclay, who was until 1988 anthropology lecturer at the University of Alberta, Canada, has also written on the anthropology of anarchy (1982; 1997). The French anthropologist Pierre Clastres has written on non-coercive power in societies without a state (1987). A non-anarchist anthropologist, Mintz, is the author of a sympathetic account of anarchists in Spain (1982).

I develop further below my search for an egalitarian anthropological method drawing on anarchism, and my critical evaluation of contemporary anthropology in its postmodern and feminist strands, and recent answers to postmodern critiques. Before moving to this, I want to present a critique of sociological categories and new social movement approaches. The question can be raised as to how relevant new social movement (NSM) studies are to an anthropological study of anarchistic currents. The vast majority of studies of what I term 'oppositional currents' are carried out by sociologists and political science academics who characterise their object as an NSM and draw on the NSM field of theory. Even with the explosion of environmental action currents through the 1990s, including avowedly anarchistic strains such as Earth First! and the anti-roads protest movement in the UK, new social movement theory is the dominant field (see for example Welsh 1996; Wall 1999). Some anarchist academics have cited new social movement theory as a key to identifying anarchism itself: in one view, for example, Melucci's descriptions are applicable to anarchism (Anarchist Research Group discussion April 1991); in another, the movements typically characterised as NSM's (from women's to green to peace) are anarchist in all but name (Tom Cahill, personal communication 1990). Boggs (1985), as discussed below, draws out the political ideas and traditions informing NSM's more adequately than most NSM studies, and finds anarchism to be one of the key influences, although it has resurfaced non-explicitly and obscurely. It was reflections such as these, by anarchist academics, that influenced my selection of Melucci and Boggs in my evaluation of new social movement theory, since these two theorists were cited as having particular relevance to conceptualising anarchism.

### **A critique of the reification of sociological categories, and new social movement approaches**

The sociological approach, particularly in new social movement theory, tends to be action-oriented and to aim to uncover the structures which are generating the behaviour of individuals. The aim is to understand the world via a set of categories which, I shall argue, are reifications, which tend to obscure the richness of oppositional currents, particularly anarchistic strands. Though Melucci (1996) warns of the problem of reification, the tendency tends to persist (see for example the evaluation of Wall 1999 below).



To outline the argument that follows, I begin with a critical account of new social movement theory. This body of theory has developed as a means of analysing oppositional movements that have emerged since the 1960s outside of the usual party/workplace system of politics. This theoretical framework could therefore be seen as relevant to the study of anarchistic and post-Situationist currents. My critique of new social movement (NSM) theory however centres round three main objections. Firstly, the existing theories do not address the guiding impulses that give rise to oppositional currents - the critique of existing conditions and desire for transformation, and the existence of a body of *ideas* as texts that are handed down from the past, which influences and informs oppositional currents.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, my critique of selected texts from NSM theory also observes the limitations of much sociological theory in understanding and describing NSM's or any oppositional current. I later develop the argument that the methods deriving from anthropology and also used in sociology in other disciplines, of participant observation – for example Geertz's (1973) notion of 'thick description', are of value. The feminist critique of postmodern approaches to anthropology is considered, with some qualifications regarding the particularist focus of feminist perspectives. Third, I also make further criticisms of postmodern anthropology on several counts including: the focus on the productions of texts rather than the motivations and practices of anthropologists, and the way important issues of global crisis and the need for social transformation are ignored. Anthropological writing from the 1970s, such as by Stanley Diamond, is evaluated for its important insights about the valuable contributions which anthropology can make to a critique of civilization, and as a means of reflecting on the motivations informing the undertaking of social research.

### **New social movement theory**

European New Social Movement theory appeared to offer a corpus of academic ideas developed to conceptualise emerging oppositional currents breaking with orthodox left strategies. The major contributors to this area, such as Melucci, appeared to have little participatory experience of the movements they studied, and a lack of self-reflexiveness about their role as sociologists. The sociological studies of currents conceptualised as new social movements – anti nuclear and green movements for example - bore little relation to my direct experience of those currents. Such sociological studies appeared not to have grasped 'new social movements' on their own

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<sup>2</sup> For example feminists collaborate and create interventions as feminists because of their sense of oppression as women in a 'patriarchal' or male-dominated system; and they become aware of and informed by a body of literature which goes back at least as far as Mary Wollstonecraft in the 18th century via the suffragettes etc to the present. Greens collaborate and create interventions because of their concern about accelerating ecological destruction and they look to the past as a resource for reclaiming traditional forms of sustainable land use and draw from a corpus of critical texts from Blake to Cobbett Kropotkin to Schumacher, Carson to Sahlins (see for example Derek Wall's *Green History* which traces links via diverse thinkers such as St Augustine Blake, Engels, Mumford, Kropotkin, Thoreau Muir (Wall 1994)

terms (a point also made by Eyerman and Jamison (1991 p 2) in their call for a cognitive approach to NSM studies).

Sociological studies of 'new social movements' range from the business/marketing jargon of the US 'resource mobilisation theory', to Touraine's 'action sociology' in France, to Melucci's theory of collective action emphasising symbolic dimensions and individual needs.<sup>3</sup> The US 'resource mobilization theory' derives its terms from a longstanding tradition steeped in social democratic and structural functionalist views which appear to take modern industrial society and its institutions as given. Their conceptualisations of so-called 'new social movements' are framed (and therefore, I argue, distorted) by the very concepts and categories used to analyse them. European NSM theory (eg. Touraine 1995; Melucci 1996) advance the notion of total transformation in the movements they study. Melucci (1996) in particular argues against the reification of the 'subject', though neither Touraine nor Melucci show clearly that this insight has been incorporated into their 'fieldwork'.

The NSM theorists discussed below (Melucci 1989, 1996; Wall 1999; Boggs 1985) tend to neglect the texts and arguments produced by the movements, with the result that the perspectives, self-definitions, language and vocabulary of the latter do not enter the framework of sociological discourse. Therefore their capacity to understand and analyse what I prefer to call 'oppositional currents' is severely limited. Sociological concepts such as 'social movements', 'collective action', 'frame realignment' can easily obscure or distort meaning. There is a tendency also to use reductive terminology which speaks the language of dominant institutions, themselves rooted in the world rejected by many contemporary oppositional currents (a point also made by Touraine 1995). The conceptualisations of so-called 'new social movements' have a tendency to be overly framed (and therefore distorted) by the very concepts and categories used to analyse them.

Two implications of this argument are: firstly, that academic discourse needs to engage with the language, discourse, terminology and ideas of the phenomena being studied; and, secondly,

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<sup>3</sup> My critique of NSM theory centres on the reification of sociological categories, and space precludes a full survey of the extensive literature on NSMs. The strands include a European emphasis on structural or systemic approaches analysing NSMs as responses to changes in post-industrial capitalism and modernity, Habermas (1984) and Touraine (1981) are key contributors in this area. Another strand developed by American theorists such as McCarthy and Zald (1987) is resource mobilization theory, which explains the establishment of NSMs in terms of ability to mobilize resources and funds.

Melucci sees limitations in both structural and resource mobilization approaches, in that both explain why movements are established, but not how (1989 p 21)

Klandermans, Kriesi and Tarrow (1988) analysed differences in national political culture and traditions of social protest as underlying different approaches to NSMs, and this has been extended to analysing national differences in oppositional traditions (eg Eyerman and Jamison 1991 p.36-38)

More recent contributions have included the development of framing theory by Snow and Gamson, and Melucci's attempt to resolve conflicts between cultural production and reproduction and resource mobilization and framing theory (Melucci 1996).

that social and 'collective' forms, networks and groupings derive from or are bound up with the ideas, ideologies and oppositions to dominant forms that inform oppositional currents. Studies of the 'sociology' of such movements, therefore, tend to be reductive and misleading, with little prominence given to the primary texts and discourses of the movements studied. Hence the importance given in this thesis to exploring the texts, notably periodicals, produced by post-Situationist and related currents.

In Europe, the term 'new social movements' was coined to express a rejection of class/workplace/labour oriented struggles for social change which characterised the 'old' social movements. The term 'social movements' itself appears however to have been one coined by academics rather than those involved in oppositional movements, new or old. The term derives from sociology in the 1930s, when communism and fascism were studied as 'potentially dangerous forms of noninstitutionalised collective political behaviour, which, if left unattended, threatened the stability of established ways of life' (Eyerman and Jamison 1991 p.10). The term 'social movements' therefore has its roots in the sociological study of norms and institutions and 'collective behaviour' in a perspective that combines elements of social democracy, structural functionalism, with vestiges of the organic metaphor of society. Llobera (1988 p.72) has discussed how terms such as mob and crowd derive from the organic metaphor of society. The terminology of poststructuralism and postmodernism is less reductive: analytical approaches deriving from Foucault's notion of discourse and power/knowledge, and the use of metaphor (for example Deleuze's metaphors of trees and rhizomes) reject conventional sociological terms with their residues of a 'statist', functionalist approach. Though at times I may refer to the term 'movement', I tend to refer to oppositional 'currents', and to locate these diachronically, as part of an oppositional tradition.

As I will argue, Melucci, Wall and Boggs neglect to convey adequately the content and ground of oppositional currents - the guiding and defining elements in all oppositional currents which are their ideas, their critique of existing conditions, their spirit of opposition, and the way in which ideas are disseminated via the materiality of texts, from both past and present, which build a body of literature in books, journals, magazines and pamphlets. The activity of writing and publishing texts, and the discussions which arise from these, form an important aspect of the lived world of radicals. Texts furthermore form the means of a sense of community amongst radicals who would otherwise be separated by distance.

I have selected the work of Melucci and Boggs for evaluation, since their work has been seen by some anarchist academics (Tom Cahill, Carl Levy) to be relevant to anarchism, and it throws up more insights than other works. I chose to analyse Wall's study of Earth First since Wall himself was a participant in the radical environmental movements he studied.

The Italian sociologist/psychotherapist Melucci makes some valid contributions to the understanding of social movements in emphasising the symbolic challenge, and their composite

rather than having a unitary character. For example, Melucci (1989 p.205) stresses the processes of networking and the participation in the movement as an end in itself, not guided by grandiose visions (though anarchist currents by definition have always emphasised the importance of 'means' as much as 'ends', arguing against the seizing of power and ruling bodies, in contrast with orthodox Marxist/leftist movements). Melucci argues that the term 'new social movements', which he says he himself was one of the first to introduce into English, has become reified (pp. 18 and 204) and sociologised. The term 'social movement' has been used to refer to collective action, a 'unified empirical datum' with a 'unitary character', with the collective reality seen to exist as a thing. Melucci points to the composite character and differentiated nature of contemporary social movements - the fact that they contain 'a plurality of levels' (p.204). Yet Melucci appears reluctant to give up the traditional terms handed down to him by the discipline of sociology - and strives 'Towards a Theory of Collective Action' (the title of the first chapter of *Nomads of the Present*) and continues to use the term 'social movements'. He seeks to 'understand the synchronic and diachronic elements of movements' and to 'explain how their diverse elements are united in organised collective action'. He however fails to address the diachronic elements of movements, adopting a mainly synchronic account which does not address the links to past traditions drawn on by movements such as the green and women's movements; and furthermore he frames his perception of contemporary 'social movements' with the sociological term 'collective action'.

Melucci's understanding and conceptualisation of the movements he addresses is therefore constrained by his conceptual framework, since the diverse and composite character of the 'movements' renders such a framework irrelevant. Benedict Anderson's (1983) conceptual term of 'imagined community' would seem more relevant in the study of contemporary 'single issue' focussed currents such as the anti-nuclear/peace, green and women's movement. The libertarian Marxist anthropologist Stanley Diamond counterposed the 'collective' with the 'community', arguing that the primitive society is a 'community...composed of reciprocating persons, and growing from within. It is not a collective. Collectives emerge in civilization; they are functional to specialised ends, and they generate a sense of *being imposed from without. They are objectively perceived, objectifying and estranging structures*' (my italics) (Diamond 1974 p.167). A more relevant terminology could be derived from the conceptualisations and language of the movements studied, rather than from sociology, particularly from an originally structural-functionalist sociology devised to understand threats to the established system

It is the *critical ideas* and their dissemination through *texts* that form common links between persons who participate in oppositional currents. Though participants in oppositional currents sporadically meet for activist interventions, these are not necessarily 'collective' in the sense that people carry out different self-directed initiatives; they may however be linked in that they share common critiques and oppositional ideas and perhaps a philosophy of action (e.g. non-violent direct action or NVDA in the 1980s and direct action in the 1990s). Oppositional ideas are

discussed and communicated verbally, and an equally important form of communication is *text* - literature from books, periodicals, pamphlets and leaflets, and via the internet. Melucci either ignores both the ideas and the texts, for example of the green and women's movements which he discusses in *Nomads of the Present* (1989); or tends to categorise them as independent of the movements (1996).<sup>4</sup>

Melucci could also take on board more of the critical perspectives on methodology thrown up by the postmodern/poststructuralist input into academic discourse. Melucci's description of his research method, in its terminology, is locked in the positivist scientific model of social science which, presumably, though not explicitly, it would seek to transcend. Melucci argues for creating a 'natural' group, an 'artificial' group, an 'experimental phase', a goal of 'assess(ing) the group's need for self-reflection' (which appears to presume that the researcher is able to assess!), a channelling back analysis to the group in exchange for the information it provides, an exchange which is seen to remove 'all trace of instrumental "exploitation" from the data-gathering process' (pp. 248-9); feedback from researchers to participants is referred to as 'stimuli' - verbal and visual (p.250). Though I can see the value of distinguishing, as Melucci does, between the phenomenological level and the interpretative level (p. 250), Melucci and his researchers could develop a more informed account of the movements they study by becoming involved as participants themselves, rather than as researchers. It is not clear what the participants later thought of the 'experimental phase' which the researchers organised. I discuss below my own experience of 'being researched' and subsequent decision not to cooperate with requests for research material from people not directly engaged in the same projects as myself. It seems relevant here to raise the question of why Melucci's groups agreed to participate in his research, under his terms. Judging from my own experience of people involved in anarchistic as well as green and anti-nuclear currents, I would deduce that many of them would not be willing to cooperate with such methods, the terms of which are devised and imposed by the researcher

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<sup>4</sup> Atton (1999) has used Melucci's categories (six organisational conditions for collective action) in a case study of the journal *Green Anarchist*. Atton uses the categories to good effect, and argues that, contrary to Melucci's expectation, movement 'media', in this case study, closely reflect the everyday practices of the 'movement'. Atton could however have derived a set of categories from the anarchist tradition (eg self-organisation, do-it-yourself, non-hierarchy) and used these as vantage points perhaps more insightfully than those of Melucci (eg diffusion of resources, self-reflexivity, self-management, experimentation). Atton, perhaps overly constrained by Melucci's concepts and concern with collective action, tends towards a myopic 'postage stamp' study, which neglects the ideas and traditions informing those involved in *Green Anarchist* (*GA*). Atton thus takes it out of context in terms of the wider movement, in which *GA* occupies a rather eccentric position. According to one radical environmental journal from Earth First! (*Do or Die* 9 pp 225-6), *GA* is 'tolerated in the anarchist and environmental movement, but has little credibility'. Atton chooses *Green Anarchist* for his case study because, he writes, it embodies the two major features of NSM activity - environmentalism and anarchism' (p 27). The reader unversed in the range of anarchist views and journals would therefore receive the impression that *Green Anarchist* was a typical example of 'environmentalism and anarchism', despite the journal's highly untypical 'support for what Steve Booth has termed "the irrationalists [who] commit acts of intense violence against the system, with no obvious motives, no pattern"' ('The irrationalists, *GA* 51, Spring '98, pp. 11-12') (Atton 1999, pp 29). This raises the issue of whether the search for collective action and the over zealous use of sociological categories risks being reductive and obscuring meaning.

as outsider (thus invoking the very forms of power relationships many contemporary oppositional currents seek to change)

Derek Wall's study of *Earth First!* (1999) is interesting in that Wall himself is an environmental activist with some participant observation experience. His interviews with activists, and sporadic references to *Earth First!* literature help build an understanding of the ideas and actions of radical green movements. The book however is disappointing in that the ethos, the spirit and impulse that underpins people's involvement in *Earth First!* is not captured in its richness. Rather than seeking to explicate the meanings – and to allow these to communicate to others – Wall looks to new social movement theory, and not to the ideas, terms and texts of radical environmentalism, in order, he argues, to help them improve their strategy. He writes that 'the movement...seemed strategically naive, having a limited conception of how fundamental economic and political forces that thrive on continuous productivist growth might be challenged' (p.8). And he makes explicit his intention to help them with reference to NSM theory.

'social movement theory can be used to investigate how protest networks grow...so as to aid green activists to better understand how they can mobilise others to create a new society.' (ibid)

Wall draws on the work of 'critical realist' theory which combines in-depth interviews and ethnography with an inductive approach whereby fieldwork generates hypotheses (Wall 1999 p.14). He notes Fielding and Fielding (1986) approach to derive 'general theory from the resolutely empirical data of anthropological ethnographers' (p 15). They argue that research cannot rest with "'emic analysis", that is, a form of analysis that accepted members' own articulation of their beliefs as sufficient' (ibid). Fielding and Fielding argue for incorporating a 'hermeneutics both of "sympathy" and of "suspicion"', using movement texts, interviews with opponents and physical description (ibid). This call to drawing on *movement texts* is an important one, though in Fielding and Fielding, and subsequently Wall's approach, this is harnessed to a theoretical approach deeply lodged in conventional sociological concepts (see above). Wall appears aware of the problems associated with theory, writing that

'Theoretical perspectives can, of course, suffocate accounts of living movements with lofty, opaque and often irrelevant intellectual baggage' (p.15)

His response to this problem is to use a 'critical realist' approach to method, to ask movement activists how they got involved, to read movement literature and to reassess his own experience as an activist, aided by a 'modest use of some nuts-and bolts social movement concepts, including networks, political opportunities resources and repertoires.' (ibid).

Wall's reading of movement literature however does not allow this to articulate sufficiently with his use of NSM theoretical perspectives which therefore tend to 'suffocate' his account of living movements with irrelevant intellectual baggage (see above, quoted from p.15). Wall's



terminology itself, deriving from NSM theory's unconscious use of military terms such as 'mobilise', 'cohorts', is symptomatic of his neglect of the ideas, categories and language of Earth First! participants themselves. Earth First! literature is occasionally referred to, and Wall makes one explicit reference to its self-organised production:

'Small militant publications, usually unnoticed by academics or the media, have also acted as informal channels for accelerated international diffusion' (p 170)

Wall limits this to the mention of a few publications, but neglects to analyse these, and furthermore omits to draw attention to the wide area of debate taking place in print in the pages of American periodicals such as *Anarchy* and *Fifth Estate* and in books outlining debates about deep ecology (for example Morris 1993; Bookchin 1994). His interviews with activists go some way to providing an ethnographic dimension, though, since their use is harnessed to sociological theory, the richness of an ethnography of persons and texts is lost and the living movement suffocated. At times Wall appears aware of this problem, and yet returns to the conventional sociological format despite his reservations. For example he makes a critique of the 'frame realignment model' which some academics have used to show 'how culture can promote movement growth' (p.143). Wall writes with perspicacity

"'Frame realignment'" can be criticised in much the same way as can the resource mobilisation and social constructivist approaches from which it derived. Movements, more so than pressure groups, are motivated by political belief, they do not construct attractive forms of ideology simply as a means of resource mobilisation. It is easy to slip from a social constructivist perspective, examining how movement literature is written or video appeals are made, to the assumption that activists simply spin words and images in search of donations to fund alternative forms of career politics' (p.143)

Wall argues that frame realignment should not be used as a method which presupposes that ideologies are no more than the raw material of mail-shot campaigns; he is nonetheless comfortable with its terms as a means of mapping ideology, and proceeds to do so in analysing Earth First! activism. The result is that Earth First! ideas, with their profound ethos of libertarianism and the rejection of scientific reason and instrumentalism, are reduced to a set of instrumental scientific processes – diagnosis, prognosis and a calling to action.

Many academics have taken on board the anti-rationality, anti-scientism and poetry of poststructuralist thought, since it offers a liberation from the constraints of orthodox academic categories. I move on to a critical discussion of postmodern anthropology later in this chapter.

If a sociological approach tends to be reductive and unself-reflexive and ignores the very 'heart' and 'tissue' of contemporary oppositional currents which arises from the critical ideas and literature emerging from these currents, it might be expected that a study from the academic

discipline of politics might more adequately capture something of contemporary oppositional movements.

Carl Boggs's *Social Movements and Political Power* (1986) does engage with some of the texts that emerged from and informed the so-called social movements during the 1970s and 1980s (e.g. Bookchin, Illich, Bahro, Gorz, Rowbotham) and shows an understanding of their central ideas and processes, and their holism, localism, spontaneism, their characteristic ebb and flow and their 'new language of critical discourse that departs profoundly from the theory and practice of conventional politics' (1986 pp. 12 and 22). Boggs also produces a historically contextualised study, mentioning links to past radical alternatives to both liberalism and Marxism, most notably anarchism, syndicalism and council communism (p.10) and drawing out the development of radical movements from the earlier workplace, class-based struggles to the 'new left' with its diverse influences including populism, anarchism, neo-Marxism, situationism, Trotskyism and Maoism, Oriental mysticism and humanistic psychology (p.11 and 22) to the emergence out of this of new movements and their emphasis on grassroots democracy.

His study is motivated by his search for 'strategic efficacy' (p.xiii) and framed by his own political conviction that these movements are too rooted in the sphere of the social and cultural - the realm of so-called 'civil society' - and that they need political translation to secure a real electoral or political presence (ibid.) in order to create 'an entirely new system of authority, a new kind of state' (p.78). This however reframes the movements with concerns which the more radical elements consciously oppose (and Boggs himself is aware that there the movements embrace many shades of opposition from the ultra-radical to the conventional/reformist). Boggs sees the need to synthesise the participatory democratic concerns and the local spontaneity of movements with a materialist conception of politics, and looks to the 'political formations (e.g. parties) likely to give expression to post-Marxist currents' (p.79) - in other words the realm with which the more radical elements in movements oppose and refuse to 'play the game' of power politics. As a result, his more detailed empirical studies look at areas in which social movements had influenced orthodox party politics -Eurosocialism in Mediterranean Europe, new populism in the United States, and the Green tendency in northern Europe, where there had emerged a division between the more radical 'Fundis' and the 'Realos' who had entered the parliamentary political arena of local and national elections<sup>5</sup>.

Thus Boggs' study is important in that it addresses the historical and critical content of the new movements in a way missed by, for example, Melucci. It is however compromised by Boggs' very explicit political stance towards the movements and by his subsequent choice of areas for empirical focus. A perspective which is strong in the more radical strands of the green

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<sup>5</sup> Three German greens, in a talk at the 'Free University' in Glasgow, 1989, emphasised how those taking on roles in the parliamentary and local council realm found themselves seduced by the status and financial rewards of their position, which compromised their more radical ideals. An awareness of this seduction underpins anarchistic critiques of dominant institutions and parliamentary processes.

movement is the theme of recuperation and dilution of critical ideas which results from participating in a more institutional political framework. From this perspective, Boggs' empirical focus could be seen as selecting parts of the movement which are undergoing recuperation; Boggs' intention is to show them rather as examples of a synthesis of the movements' appeal to civil society to a more institutional political framework.

Boggs also reveals his own commitment to modernity and to industrial society, which is at odds with some strains in the new movements - in particular the green/ecology movement.

There is, then, a tension and contradiction in Boggs' study. On the one hand he draws out the anarchistic elements in the new movements and the 'assault on authoritarianism in all spheres of life', which grew out of the 1960s new left. This of course is of direct interest in itself for this thesis. Boggs identifies elements in the new movements which obviously overlap with (if not derive from) anarchism: for example the 'nonstatist process of radical change' (p.237) and anarchism as, like the new movements, stressing 'prefigurative activity within local autonomous forms, directed against the multiple forms of domination' (p.238). He sees the 'left' presence within some of the movements (particularly the ecologists) as 'commonly linked to a neo-anarchism with its utopian vision of the future, its unrelenting critique of bourgeois society, and its holistic commitment to social change' (p.14). Boggs then identifies important areas lost to Melucci's overly synchronic sociological vantage point, in terms of ideas and of links to the past. But on the other hand, Boggs explicitly adopts a Gramscian perspective of hegemony and counterhegemony to analyse what he calls 'post-Marxist' movements, and is concerned to identify penetration of the movements into existing political-institutional spheres, which skews a clear understanding that the more radical elements in the new movements explicitly avoid entering this kind of realm.

In my critical discussions of Melucci, Wall and Boggs (selected as three writers offering more incisive studies in the field of social movements), I am not denying the validity of different vantage points from which to discuss areas of contemporary reality such as oppositional currents. I am rather pointing to some limitations which have to do with the way in which the authors impose other agendas on the currents in question, agendas which tend ultimately to be either contradictory, irrelevant or reductive. Melucci is particularly constrained by his terms of analysis and his overly synchronic approach and sociologisation of 'social movements'. Boggs is freer in this respect, calling them 'new movements' and 'popular protest movements' interchangeably and situating them in historical context. Boggs nonetheless reframes and skews an understanding of new movements by his desire to synthesise them to the existing political-institutional systems of modern industrial society, which many elements in the new movements explicitly reject and eschew. Wall, as an activist himself, has in some respects a more sensitive grasp of his material, though his adherence to methods and concepts deriving from new social

movement theory and critical realism tends to skew and misrepresent the very tissue and ethos of Earth First! and related environmental currents.

The terminology of new social movement theory is limiting: I prefer the use of the term 'oppositional current', since it captures the fluidity and the ebb and flow of contemporary libertarian currents. It also captures the sense of the impulse underpinning its existence as having its basis in critical ideas, instead of presenting a movement as a unified actor writ large on the stage of history. An oppositional current is more readily seen as constituted by living persons, informed and inspired by critical ideas. I develop further the notion of an oppositional 'impulse' in Chapter 5.

I also argue that an important means of learning from and about oppositional currents is via the social relationships and interventions of those involved. Melucci 1989 (and Touraine and his version of action sociology 1981) has carried out interactive research with groups in the social movements studied, but advocates undertaking this as a researcher and sociologist and not as an engaged participant of the movement being studied. This creates an unequal power relationship (and poses the question as to why those involved in oppositional currents would want to participate in research controlled by academics who were not participants themselves). The result is that the researchers<sup>6</sup> are constrained to convey a finely tuned grasp of the currents, their phenomenological levels and the 'spirit' of their opposition and informing ideas.

### **An evaluation of anthropology**

The traditional anthropological method provides a counter to this - a means of conveying how people create meanings and experience their lived world, garnered through interactive relations and experiences. It is important for those writing about the processes of oppositional currents to write as participants engaged for reasons other than merely research - in other words because of their own critical ideas as radicals, anarchists, environmentalists and so on.

Another important element addressed by this thesis is the ideas and terms of oppositional currents and their rich tradition of critical discourse, often self-published and distributed by participants in the case of anarchist and radical ecological currents. I suggest that this is a key means by which ideas become taken up and developed - by means of print even more than discussion and action. An aspect of this rich tradition is the mode of play and humour as a powerful and enjoyable means of exposing to critique the dominant world. This has a long history from so-called 'avant garde' movements of the 1920s (dada and the surrealists) onwards,

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<sup>6</sup> I also acknowledge the potential for crossovers between academia and oppositional currents. It needs to be said, however, that those who have taken up a critique of the institutions of modern life, such as some anarchists (eg. class struggle anarchists) and those sympathetic too the ideas of the Situationists, will tend to be cynical about the capacity of academics to transcend their careerist and elitist profession, and be wary of 'recuperation'.

through the lettrists and situationists, and is notable as an element in anarchism, related fringe currents and the radical ecology/anti-road protest movements.

For my purposes here, anthropology forms the most fitting of the disciplines inherited from the specialisms of academic discourse, since it traditionally encompasses the totality of the social forms studied, via ethnographic research. In its crossover with archaeology, anthropology also addresses the materiality and symbolic representations involved. This sphere - texts as artefacts, and as symbolic representations - tends to be overlooked in sociological and political focuses such as Melucci's and Boggs'. Writing, print and publishing are important spheres of activity constituting anarchist and post-Situationist currents. Texts also form one significant means by which individuals create a sense of community in a modern world in which the chances of living near other like-minded individuals are small. Not only does writing and publishing provide a link and a communication with others with similar values, but reading, and discussion of texts, is a means of establishing community. Texts therefore form a rich symbolic world of semi-autonomous zones (the idea of 'temporary autonomous zones' derives from the American anarchist Hakim Bey's concept - see Bey 1991), and need to be addressed on their own terms rather than being subsumed in the terms of new social movement theory or other agendas.

The anthropological method, with its emphasis on interactive relationships with people in everyday life, also provides a means of conveying the lived worlds and experience - the ethos of oppositional currents - which are missing from most studies of social movements. Sherry Ortner has argued that studies of resistance are limited by the lack of an ethnographic perspective, a 'bizarre refusal to know and speak and write of the lived worlds inhabited by those who resist (or do not, as the case may be)' (1995, p.188). Ortner, offering a minimal definition of ethnography which she claims still stands mostly unchallenged, sees ethnography as meaning 'the attempt to understand another life world using the self - as much of it as possible - as the instrument of knowing' (p.173). She sees the ethnographic stance as a 'commitment to what Geertz has called "thickness", to producing understanding through richness, texture and detail' (p 174). I do not identify with Geertz's overall perspectives or in the main those of interpretative/hermeneutic/symbolic anthropology, which I find insufficiently political and critical in motivation and content (see for example anthropologist Bob Scholte's critiques of Geertz's terrain (Scholte 1986). Geertz's notion, however, of ethnography as writing richness, texture and detail is a positive insight, despite the rather prosaic, uninspiring term, coined by Geertz, of 'thick description'. And certainly this level of understanding (or, as I prefer it call it, learning) is certainly omitted from most studies of social movements, and is one I am committed to, though not in this case to understand 'another life world', but as a means of conveying experience of one of the worlds of which I am a part.

Anthropology has also benefited, in the last few decades, from internal debates and criticisms, which have helped create a more reflexive discipline than most. For example, Evans-Pritchard concluded in the 1950s that if anthropology was not history, then it was nothing. Other critical perspectives include an examination, particularly from Marxist anthropologists, of the colonial roots of anthropology and (Dell Hymes (ed.) 1972; Diamond 1974/1987; Asad 1973); the work of feminist anthropologists in highlighting androcentrism in anthropological writing; and the postmodern turn which problematized ethnographic representation and the right of anthropologists to speak for others (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

The collected papers in Clifford and Marcus's *Writing Culture* (1986) continue to have a significant influence in anthropology and cultural history over a decade later. They represent an important contribution in exposing the artificiality of ethnographic texts, their partial nature, their narrative forms, which are nearer literature and poetics than science, and the last remnants of scientific influence on the construction of ethnographic knowledge. As Tyler states, ethnographic evidence is fragmentary and, rather than revealing allegories of wholes, cultural or theoretical, is rather 'a collection of indexical anecdotes or telling particulars' (p.131).

Stephen Tyler's article in particular is important in representing an attempt to suggest ways to liberate the anthropological writer from the impersonal style of pseudo-scientific, pseudo-objective rhetoric which characterise most academic texts (a point relevant to Melucci, particularly with reference to his research method (1988)); Tyler, for example, advocates the idea of 'evoking' rather than 'representing', freeing ethnography from scientific rhetoric with its 'objects', 'facts', 'verification', 'classifying', 'generalising' (1986 p.130):

'The urge to conform to the canons of scientific rhetoric has made the easy realism of natural history the dominant mode of ethnographic prose, but it has been an illusory realism, promoting, on the one hand, the absurdity of "describing" nonentities such as "culture" or "society" as if they were fully observable, though somewhat ungainly, bugs, and, on the other, the equally ridiculous behaviourist pretence of "describing" repetitive patterns of action in isolation from the discourse that actors use in constituting and situating their action, and all in simpleminded surety that the observers' grounding discourse is itself an objective form sufficient to the task of describing acts.' (1986 p.130).

This is an important critique. Tyler however reveals his own vestiges of scientific sociological rhetoric with the term 'actors', a somewhat distancing and abstract term for what Diamond rather calls simply 'persons', a term which more ably retains the personhood more ably and conveys more of an 'I/thou' relationship, as Buber advocated, than the us-and-them relationship conveyed by the distant abstracting quality of the term 'actor'. This is particularly relevant for studies of contemporary social movements, whose explicit anti-militaristic ideas and shared search for a non-militaristic language - common to the green, the anti-nuclear peace and the women's movements - seem lost to academic writers in both sociology and anthropology who use



military terms such as 'mobilisation', 'recruit' etc. It is also significant that the term 'subaltern' studies, of which Spivak is a key proponent, is one which derives from the US military – 'subaltern' refers to a subordinate below the level of captain.

To return to Tyler, his claim that 'ethnography can perform a therapeutic purpose in evoking a participatory reality' (p.128) is an important one. His notion of a participatory text 'in which no one has the exclusive right of synoptic transcendence' (p.129), however, seems misplaced, since his strategy masks the power of the ethnographer as writer in controlling and authorising which voices are heard. He argues for polyphonic, dialogic texts. As Friedman has argued, 'true dialogics is not an intratextual but an intertextual phenomenon', and the 'single dialogic text may express the attempt to recapture and thus neutralise, once more, the relation between us and them by assuming that the anthropologist can represent the other's voice ' (1988 29:3 p.427). Perhaps Friedman could have used the word 'evoke' rather than 'represent', since Tyler claims not to represent: but the valid point is that it is the ethnographer who selects and controls the text, and ultimately therefore has authority, masked in the guise of participatory polyphonia. /

Postmodern anthropology has thrown up some responses to Marcus and Clifford, and there is some consensus around analytic judgement or a critical empiricism. Hastrup's claim for a 'passage to anthropology' is presented as an elucidation of 'some of the basic conditions for anthropological knowledge...at a time of scholarly uncertainty in the wake of a self-declared postmodernism that made of the world a paradox of unification and fragmentation – inaccessible for science, if ready for narrative' (Hastrup 1996 p.8). Hastrup's contribution raises some positive ideas: the incorporation of epistemology and ethics in a theory-building based on radical interpretation and charity, and objectivity and solidarity (p.181); the notion of regaining realism which does not preclude judgement, common sense and critical intelligence (p.180); and the notion of an itinerary rather than a map (p.8). Her arguments show sensitivity in seeking to go beyond the two untenable poles of objectivity or realism, and relativism (p.185). Her embrace of the proclaimed eccentricity of anthropological theory that explicitly challenges Enlightenment notions of rationality and reason (p. 186), contradicts her reinstatement of anthropology as a 'science' (p 185) and her uncritical references to the 'scientific aim of the anthropologist' (p 50)

Fardon (1990) raises important critiques of the postmodern turn in anthropology, in particular of the ahistorical approach of Tyler's postmodern ethnography which he sees as 'divested of reason, power, critical function (other than self-referentiality), regional context, historical development' (p.19). As Fardon points out, postmodern ethnographic criticism has 'not only failed to dislodge the old order but unknowingly endorsed it' (p.4). Tyler's distinction between evocation and representation, as Fardon argues, assumes that representations are necessarily coercive, and necessitates mental effort on the part of the reader (p.18). Fardon's call for

localizing strategies to counter the tendency to rhetorical and literary stereotypes of vast regions (eg Africa, India, America) is another positive contribution.

Neither Hastrup nor Fardon, however, are sufficiently critical or anthropological on their own role as 'experts', paid by mainly Western institutions, and their discussions do not adequately address the processes of capitalist penetration and global domination based on business interests, largely controlled by a Western elite. Their focus is on, in Hastrup's case, redeeming the 'sinking' discipline of anthropology, or on the notion of itinerary (1996 pp.10, 186). In Fardon's case, his focus is on localizing strategies. Anthropologists such as Hastrup and Fardon, with such particularist focus, risk two failures. First, their discourse risks turning inward, speaking only to others in the academic milieu and failing in the role of public intellectuals (Hastrup's language of 'performative paradox', 'performative parallax', 'parallactic power' and 'performative indeterminacy' (all on p.186) is a case in point). Second, they risk failing adequately to notice or address the 'itinerary', to use Hastrup's favoured expression, of global capitalist penetration and the 'sinking' ship, not of anthropology, but of the world and its peoples, as the environmental destruction wrought by industrial modernisation processes bites further and deeper.

Hastrup aims for the intersubjective creation of knowledge which will be of use to those studied. And she writes

'The fieldworker's experience of different worlds leads her to question the foundations of her own' (p.50)

'Social change may result from the creative imagination that emerges in the language of contrast. From the chaos of the contact zone, anthropology alchemizes a general theory that expands on the world.' (p.186)

This evades an explicit political critique of power and processes of domination. Hastrup could benefit from the stance of Diamond outlined later in the chapter.

Hastrup rejects the imperialist nostalgia of traditional anthropology, the 'exotic' view of culture, the distant, primitive or tribal other (p.6). Culture, she argues, is no longer seen as a 'primordial entity', but as a particular analytic perspective; the categories of 'selves' and 'others' have been dismantled and are redefined as categories of thought. The redefinition, she argues, is one reason why anthropology has become a potentially critical analysis of one's own society (p 6), with the anthropologist as 'radical other', and one speaking from the periphery, in a position of deliberate eccentricity. (pp.7- )

An over-emphasis, however, on dismantling categories of difference, on rejecting nostalgia, and on rejecting the apocalyptic imagery of the world as falling apart, and anthropology along with it (p 184), risks colluding with the global system's process of power, control, domination and exploitation, which is destroying not only anthropology's traditional objects of small-scale

and relatively sustainable cultures, but the sustainability of Western lives and of the earth itself. In contrast, those anthropologists who continue to write on hunter-gatherer societies, in the face of critiques from other anthropologists who have dismantled the category of hunter-gatherer itself, are to a large extent motivated by their own critique of modernisation processes, and their concern to learn from those they study. As Lee and Daly write,

'the hunter-gatherers may well be able to teach us something, not only about past ways of life but also about long-term human futures. If technological humanity is to survive it may have to learn the keys to longevity from fellow humans whose way of life has been around a lot longer than industrial commercial 'civilization'. As Burnum Burnum, the late Australian Aboriginal writer and lecturer put it, "Modern ecology can learn a great deal from a people who managed and maintained their world so well for 50,000 years."' (Lee and Daly eds 1999 p.1)

The argument is picked up again later with reference to Diamond.

I want to return once again to one of the originators of postmodern ethnography, Clifford, and subsequently to a discussion of feminist anthropology as offering more insights on the power relationship between anthropologist and peoples studied. Postmodern ethnography tends to be more self-reflexive about form and style than about their status as ethnographers and the process of globalisation. Clifford, in the introduction to *Writing Culture*, has raised the question of the 'sharp separation of form from content' and 'fetishization of form' in the articles (p.21). In their critique, from a feminist perspective, of the postmodern literary turn in anthropology exemplified by Clifford and Marcus (1986), and Marcus and Fischer (1986), Mascia-Lees et al have highlighted the emphasis on style:

'In keeping with postmodernism's emphasis on style, the authors claim that it is through new types of experimental ethnographic writing that anthropology can best expose the global systems of power relations that are embedded in traditional representations of other societies.'

The problem of a fetishization of form is that it can become a pursuit in itself, obscuring deeper and more important questions about the purpose of research and writing.

The articles in *Writing Culture*, and answers to postmodernism by for example Hastrup and Fardon, are less reflexive about their role as academics from elitist institutions and the right of academics to carry out research cross culturally. There is growing awareness amongst 'indigenous' peoples, particularly in Australia and America, of the imposition of Western anthropologists carrying out research amongst them, and some refuse to cooperate with all but an indigenous anthropologist. As Mascia-Lees et al point out, many Native Americans 'have frequently refused dialogue with the anthropologist whom they see as yet one more representative of the oppressive culture.' (1989 *Signs* p 25). Mascia-Lees et al claim that feminist anthropology had been exploring the main insights of postmodern anthropology - for

example that constructing the 'other' entails relations of domination – for the past forty years. The authors argue that in the early phase of feminism, feminism and anthropology were similar in that

'Both were concerned with the relationship of the dominant and the "other", and with the need to expand and question definitions of the human.' (1989 p.11)

Even at this stage, they argue, there was a crucial difference between anthropological and feminist inquiries:

'While anthropology questioned the status of the participant-observer, it spoke from the position of the dominant and thus for the "other". Feminists speak from the position of the "other".' (ibid).

As though to forestall resistance from the reader at the potentially naive implication that all women speak as the other in relation to men and that this was a corresponding experience to that of non-Western peoples to Westerners, they write 'This is not to simplify', and move on to how women in consciousness-raising groups gave voice to and constructed new discourses on women's perspectives. (ibid. 11-12). The authors mention the developments in feminist theory which address the multiplicity and diversity of women in terms of class, ethnicity etc (p.23); and discuss the arguments of Judith Stacey about whether any ethnography of the "other" can be compatible with feminist politics, since the 'actual differences in power, knowledge and structural mobility "places research subjects at grave risk of manipulation and betrayal by the ethnographer"' (Stacey 1988 pp.21-27 in Mascia Lees 1989 p.21). This is an important point which is not adequately addressed or solved by the forms of polyphonic dialogic ethnographic writing advocated in Clifford, Marcus et al's 'postmodern ethnography'. I would like to take this line of questioning further and question the right to carry out social research.

There are two points to be drawn out here - the right of Western academics to arrive in non-Western places and expect people to cooperate with their research (notwithstanding Hastrup's (1996) notion of dissolving differences between the West and the non-West); and the right of academics generally to move outside their own personal spheres of involvement and expect people to participate in their research.

The first area seems to me ethically problematic: put bluntly (but far more honestly than either Clifford and Marcus et al (or Mascia-Lees et al) do), I am dubious about the process of research, carried out by anthropologists, as Westerners in non-Western places, with often very limited skills in the language spoken there, and who assume that local people will be happy to give their time to aid research, which will probably benefit the researcher's career far more than it will benefit those whose lives and culture are the subject of research. I am not arguing that such research should never be carried out, but that the motivation of the researcher needs to be explored thoroughly with respect to its purpose, and discussed with potential participants in

research. John Burdick addresses Delmos J. Jones's article 'Towards a Native Anthropology' (1970) and Jones' claim that neither 'insiders' nor 'outsider's could claim inherent superiority of their ethnographic representations. Burdick argues that there are contexts in which 'the very status of outside purveyor of ethnographic claims is precisely what insiders need to get their own political work done.' (1995 p.384n). This may be so, but Burdick does not include the opinion of the 'subjects' of ethnography on this. I would argue that such a collaboration must take place at the request of the people being researched themselves, since the potentially patronising assumption of this argument is that these people can't get their own political work done themselves (and of course one anarchist principle is that people can organise themselves and that leaders and intellectual vanguards only undermine this potential) I will move later to some ethical motivations that might mitigate against the more dubious elements involved in Western/non-Western ethnographic research situations.

I am almost as hesitant about the ethics of carrying out research in one's native (or other Western) land. In 1996 the *Sunday Times* carried an article about the government-funded study of the BBC to be carried out by a team of academic researchers, including anthropologists. The response quoted from 'a source' was:

"Some of us feel as if we are stuck on the wrong side of the bars in a zoo" (*Sunday Times* August 1996).

This response is revealing: those in powerful media institutions, objecting to the idea of being researched and made the focus of participant observation, cite the sensation of being observed and studied like animals at the zoo (and note the link here to Tyler's reference to the scientific rhetoric and attitudes of *natural history* as influencing traditional ethnography). It might be an unconscious response of non-Western (and Western) people chosen as the 'objects' of research of anthropologist and sociologists, and one which would surface more clearly if those 'objects', often oppressed and marginal, were not so accustomed to such imbalances of power relations and instrumental situations initiated by those in dominant positions). 'Anthropology at home' is a significant strand in the discipline, though there is nonetheless a tendency to gravitate towards oppressed and marginal groups for areas of study, rather than areas in which the research has direct personal involvement, or in areas occupied by upper middle and ruling class or establishment. It would be interesting, for example, to see more anthropological studies of academia, and critical studies of the civil service and the world of CEOs in corporations.

I have personal anecdotal evidence that there is little to be gained by co-operating in research from those entering a sphere for research reasons only. For many years my children have been out of the school system, and part of a network of families educating their children out of school. This attracts some academic research as well as media interest. There are a few families who willingly respond to requests from journalists and academics for interviews etc (generally those whose style of structured home education conforms to mainstream expectations of what

would be a 'suitable' substitute for school). My family however has learnt to be wary of such requests, and mainly to refuse or ignore them. Our experience is that those who are not involved in the process of out of school education are unable to grasp or convey through writing anything meaningful about our experience.<sup>7</sup>

As an illustration of the high level of awareness of misrepresentation in anarchistic circles, a heated discussion took place at a meeting of the London Anarchist Forum (18 April 1997), after a student photojournalist, who had attended one or two meetings, asked permission to take photographs of people there. Though a couple (of elderly men) were happy to oblige, several people refused, pointing out that photos can be used to distort phenomena in a negative light (e.g. with the use of captions and selected photos). I was one of those who refused. I explained to the student that anarchists are wary of mainstream representations and tend to maintain a do-it-yourself ethic, aiming always to represent themselves (hence, incidentally, the rich current of self-organised publishing). Another person present also refused, saying that if he wanted his photograph taken he would ask a friend to do it, and pointed to her lack of scruples in wishing to further her career by taking photos of anarchists (there was an expression of concern by some people on the room at this rather personal attack). As indicated in this example, many anarchistic individuals not only espouse a strong do-it-yourself ethic but also are aware of the power relations between dominant media and marginal currents' interests and wary of the tendency of dominant institutions and media to misrepresent them.

If 'participant observation', 'fieldwork' and 'ethnography' are the 'badge' and the prerequisite experience of the aspiring anthropologist, this could be inverted: the anthropologist's 'rite de passage' could involve the process of being 'observed', interviewed and written about. Undergoing this experience could throw up questions about (mis)representation, distortion and the experience of the power relationship involved in being researched by a so-called 'expert' on analysing their lives and experience. Furthermore, while more positivist anthropologists still locked in the terms of social science might refer to their subjects as 'social actors', and what they do as 'collective behaviour', those versed in a (probably partial) knowledge of 'postmodern anthropology' might refer to their accounts, often of important life experiences, as merely 'narratives' and theorise on them through depersonalising abstraction, a currently fashionable example of which is 'the body'.

I do not wish to imply that I deem all social research to be unethical. Ideally all research should connect to the researcher's own involvement, as persons and not just as academic (or journalistic) researchers. I respect the important goals of anthropology, identified in the

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<sup>7</sup> One researcher, Alan Thomas, carried out research on home education through a method of participant observation and spent time in our house. When this part of his research was written up, he sent it to me for approval. Though his observations were not inaccurate, they did not capture the richness of my children's daily lives and how they educate themselves. I found his writing therefore to be misleading and irrelevant.

following ways: as salvaging 'distinct cultural forms of life from the processes of global Westernization' and serving as a 'form of cultural critique of ourselves' (Marcus and Fischer 1986); pursuing 'a continuous tradition of debate around certain problems concerning humankind' (Jarvie 1987 p.429); and playing off the corpus of anthropological texts 'against one another in an endless process of coaxing up images of the real.' (Ortner 1995 p 190).

It is important that we learn about the history and diversity of humankind, not merely for intellectual purposes but for political and ethical ones, and for the purposes of transformation of ourselves and our world. Stanley Diamond, as one of the key figures involved in the 1960s and 70s in 'reinventing anthropology' (the title of the book edited by Dell Hymes 1972) as an existential search for liberation, stated his reasons for engaging in anthropological research:

'In this anthropological experiment which we initiate, it is not they who are the ultimate objects but ourselves. We study men, that is, we reflect on ourselves studying others, because we must, because man in civilization is the problem. Primitive peoples do not study man. It is unnecessary: the subject is given... We, on the contrary, are engaged in a complex search for the subject in history, as the precondition for a minimum definition of humanity and, therefore, of self-knowledge as the ground for self-criticism. The questions we bring to history come out of our own need. The task of anthropology is to clarify these questions.' (Diamond 1974 p.100).

This contrasts with the postmodern concern expressed by Tyler of ethnography's potential to 'perform a therapeutic purpose in evoking a participatory reality' (Marcus and Clifford 1986 p.128). Diamond's concern goes beyond therapy to a concern with the transformation of the existing totality of conditions. I quote again at length:

'It is only in modern civilization that the state dynamic compounded by secondary imperialism is totalitarian, and disassociation from our human possibilities, our species being, increasingly acute... The question... is one of learning the reasons for our alienation, denying the inevitability of history and understanding that for 40,000 years man survived and formulated his own existence in the absence of the state. Western man cannot afford to mystify his situation as being "progressive", except in the sense implied by Marx. Perhaps the most alienated can, by confronting and acting on their condition, free themselves. Only then can we speak of progress, which is always, in part, a primitive return; a reformulation of old impulses in new situations and social structures. The task is Herculean, to confine the state as a form of society to the anthropological "museum of antiquities". (1974 p.48)

'It is not, and cannot be, a question of grafting primitive forms on civilised structures or of "retreating" into the primitive past. It is not a question of regaining lost paradises or savage nobility... The problem, and it remains the central problem of anthropology, is to help conceptualise contemporary forms that will reunite man with his past, reconcile the primitive with the civilised, making progress without distortion theoretically possible, or, at least, enabling us to experience the qualities that primitive peoples routinely display. This, in turn,

demands innovation of the highest order, even if nourished on despair...What better place is there to begin than with the rational devolution of bureaucracy, the common ownership and decentralisation of the basic means of production, for which we have the techniques at hand and for which we must develop the apposite social imagination. Human beings have lived in analogous circumstances before, we learn from anthropology, and it seems essential that we learn to do so again, albeit on a higher level and in different forms. Reflexive, merely determined behaviour, condemns us to the destructive course of our civilization, to the irresponsibility of our fate.' (1974 p.174-5)

Diamond has something of a fan club of followers writing in *Dialectical Anthropology* (the eulogic tone of the three memorial issues is notable). Diamond's own engagement and rhetoric for transformation of the 'most alienated' - in the Western and civilised world - is surprisingly absent in writings in the journal. The contributors proclaim the superiority of Diamond's reflexive anthropology over the postmodern literary version but limit their focus on their own conditions of existence to the odd line. One example is Ulin, who mentions

'conditions (in which anthropological and historical narrative traditions were formed) which in their political form have yet to be transcended.' (Ulin 1994 p.398)

In a distortion of Diamond's ideas, one writer in *Dialectical Anthropology* mentions that civilization is not as good for some, alluding to American Indians, as it is for others. This obscures the full meaning of Diamond's writing, which is intended as a critique of civilization as manifested in the West and globally.

The contrast between Diamond's critique of civilization and engaged political rhetoric and Tyler's 'therapeutic purpose' is a significant one. For the last few decades have seen, not just in anthropology but in all fields, a turning away, not only from concern with our global crisis and engagement with transformation, but also from a sense of public responsibility to speak as intellectuals to a potentially wider public than the academic milieu. Jonathan Friedman has seen postmodern anthropology and its concern with intratextual dialogics as 'an expression of the collapse of a public sphere of discussion' (Friedman 1988 p 427). It is ironic that some of Friedman's own writing might be analysed as an example of an agenda which has contributed to a retreat from the public sphere of discussion. For example, an article co-written by Friedman with Eckholm, entitled 'Towards a Global Anthropology' (1985 pp 97-119) shows a perspective which sees phenomena as highly determined by structures and systems. The account is inaccessible to a wider audience, and Friedman's perspectives deny any agency or possibility of change to the person or human subject. Traditional societies in all their diversity are reduced to features 'dependent on the larger system, either as 'expansionist tribal structures' which 'often expand into states and so-called "barbarian" empires', or 'primitive structures' which are 'blocked by their position within the larger system', 'so blocked in their own expansion that they experience breakdown, internal warfare and declining resources.' (pp 114-5) This is a variation



of the evolutionism which Friedman and Eckholm set up to attack. In their own form of evolutionism, traditional societies are conceived as merely the by-products of civilisation. This implies that under different circumstances they would have evolved into civilisations themselves and that civilisation is the teleological 'end-product' to which human society evolves. Friedman and Eckholm draw on a few examples to support this, such as the Amazonian Indians who were once extensive chiefdoms and as a result of European interventions turned to hunting/gathering as 'the final stage of a devolutionary process and not a stable adaptation' (p.108). I recognise that the authors' concern is to criticise the idea of primitive/traditional societies as 'bounded objects' that pervaded ethnographies until the 1960s. Their account however tends towards a reductive and evolutionist account of global connexions, and is an example of a loss of engagement with transformation, and of the 'collapse of a public sphere of discussion' which Friedman cites later (1988).

The problem however stems from more than the 'collapse of a public sphere of discussion': public intellectuals themselves have retreated from addressing issues affecting global human conditions. Diamond (1974/1987) could have strengthened his argument by evaluating more critically those oppressive conditions and practices that exist among non-civilised peoples. He tends to posit a strong dichotomy between 'primitive'=good/'civilized'=bad. To Diamond's credit, however, his writing constantly returned to a critique of civilization, the state and oppression, to the extent of recognising that those in power are as enchained as those they have power over (p.18).

This is where postmodern ethnography in particular has given up a sense of responsibility, as Mascia-Lees et al have argued, about framing questions and being explicit about their explicit political structure, risking the danger of hidden agendas (Mascia-Lees et al 1989 p 22). Like Diamond, Mascia-Lees et al argue for research goals to be defined by their concern with questions of power and political struggle, questions about 'how to change (an oppressed group's) conditions; how its world is shaped by forces beyond it; how to win over, defeat or neutralise those forces (quoting Sandra Harding 'Introduction: Is there a Feminist Method?' in Harding (ed) 1987 quoted in Mascia Lees 1989 p. 23). There are two limitations to this. Firstly, the argument neglects the essential point that there needs to be an engagement with power relations generally and not just within the oppressed group studied or gender patriarchal relations. Secondly, that creating a separate discourse, as the feminist anthropology of *Signs* or in women's studies, ignores the common ground in the way in which men (or any other section) are oppressed, and restricts the possibility of dialogue with other groups (e.g. men). The problem of *audience* is raised again. Rabinow, in *Writing Culture*, states that feminism is not an intellectual position he personally can hold, and he sees himself as "excluded from direct participation in the feminist dialogue" (Rabinow 1986 in Clifford and Marcus eds. quoted in Mascia-Lees et al 1989). While I know of many men who see no contradiction in their holding feminist intellectual positions, Rabinow's response is revealing in that it appears to allude to his

sense of being excluded, in part because of the primary issue of feminist discourse is about women and not men.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, intellectuals formed a dialogue between different spheres and disciplines - R.D.Laing, Marcuse, Roszak, Buber, socialists, anarchists, hippies (illustrated for example of the Dialectics of Liberation conference at the Roundhouse in London 1967), and the audience addressed was not only inter-disciplinary but also potentially universal. Ethnographers such as Colin Turnbull also wrote for a wide audience, and evoked (to use Tyler's favourite word) the communality and relatively egalitarian relations amongst the Mbuti 'pygmies'. This engagement can be contrasted to the loss of engagement with transformatory currents, such as is the tendency in the example of Friedman and Eckholm's thesis about primitive people (see above) as merely devolutionary blocked forms.

The retreat of public intellectuals, particularly in the last decade, can be observed in the way that academics speak increasingly within their own circles. Anthropologists also, in their studies of the 'other, tend to neglect to make links with their own conditions and Western culture and to engage in explicit political and cultural critique. It is not so much a case of Fabian's 'denial of coevalness', of the sharing of the same time (Fabian 1983), but a denial of what is common to the experience and conditions of sharing the same world and evaluating and learning from other conditions. Buber's call for an I/thou relationship between writer and written about could also be expanded to an I/we relationship as well.

Furthermore, academia tends to neglect other currents and discourses. This is particularly evident in the studies of new social movements and oppressed groups, where the shared language and discourse of oppositional currents is not taken on board (see above for my discussion of the military terms used in describing explicitly anti-militaristic currents such as the green, women's and anti-nuclear/peace movements). The anthropologist Jonathan Friedman, to his credit, has recognised the rise of for example fourth world movements and primitivist movements, but only to fit these to a systemic global analysis, and not to learn from the emerging critical perspectives. (Eckholm and Friedman 1985; Friedman 1983).

## Conclusions

My critical evaluation of selected new social movement theory texts, and of a range of anthropological texts, has been made not primarily for the purposes of a literature survey, but in order to clarify my own differences with the approaches evaluated, to explicate further my own perspectives. I document further my methodology and notions of 'observant participation' and 'convivial' research in the Appendix.

My perspectives centre on three main concerns. Firstly, my critique of the reification of sociological categories is not intended to argue for the jettisoning of all abstractions, for

example those used in analysing and criticising the existing world. It is aimed rather towards the task of identifying ways in which sociological concepts reify those persons in the area of study, and their oppositional impulses, actions, thoughts and feelings, thus tending to reduce their personhood, their relationships and activities merely to 'social movements' or 'collective behaviour'. This skews the relationship between researcher/writer and the people in the area of study. The written account may then lose the richness of lived worlds and ideas, and tend towards a rather reductionist and overly abstracted thesis. I argue, instead, for an egalitarian and convivial encounter between persons, and a written account of research that seeks to convey the richness and the ethos of lived worlds and oppositional ideas.

Secondly, there is the potential power relationship between academic and 'subjects'. I would hope that most ethnographers and those undertaking interviews, both in sociology and anthropology, relate to the people they study as equals, conversing with them as fellow human beings from whom they can learn. A more explicit awareness of the privileged status of paid academic, and a critique of the role of specialist, would be beneficial to research and writing. The Situationist critique of the specialist roles that people adopt – such as those of priest, soldier, militant, teacher, academic – that separate them from themselves and form a distortion (Vaneigem 1983 pp.131-3) is relevant to this discussion. See Chapter 12 for discussion of a text in which Vaneigem's critique of roles is drawn on in order to bring critical reflections on the role of activist in anti-capitalist currents. Situationist critiques of roles, separation and specialism has been extended by Barrot (see Chapter 5) to an emphasis on the importance of *being* different, of acting in the here and now in a way that is, as far as possible, commensurate with the desired transformation – the refusal of authoritarian roles, for example. I argue, therefore, for a conscious shift in the identity of 'researcher' or 'academic' to that, rather, of fellow human being, wanting to learn from the persons studied, in a relationship of equality. The anthropologist Stanley Diamond is quoted for his insights in a similar vein.

In relation to this point, and to the discussion in this chapter generally, I do not wish to give the impression that I reject all aspects of academic discourse or social research; my discussion calls rather for critical evaluation and self-criticism. Academia should not become like the medieval church, with critics from within and without excluded and labelled as heretics. Its traditional methods should not be orthodoxies.

Finally, my third main concern centres on the motivations behind academic research and writing – why and for what purpose this is carried out. The point made by Marx that philosophers have merely interpreted the world and that the point is to change it, is relevant here. I argue that academics can take on board the anthropologist Stanley Diamond's argument that we study others – and by extension to other disciplines, other phenomena – because we must, because humans in civilization are the problem (Diamond 1974 p 100, and see quoted extracts above). Academia should beware too the retreat into ever more specialised areas of

discourse that distracts us from exploring those processes that are driving globalisation. Academic research needs to reflect, and be directed towards, the goal of averting the social and environmental catastrophe, that modern industrial capitalist processes and globalisation are continually taking us towards. One of the purposes of universities should be to give students the tools to think for themselves, to provide them with an awareness of the problems besetting our age, and ideas that reflect critically on the processes creating our crisis. This means challenging, rather than taking as given, the ideologies that present constructs such as God, or Capitalism, or the State or Modernization as normal, natural or inevitable. See Chapter 10 for theoretical reflections, drawing on phenomenology and critical theory, on how ideological mystification can be stripped away; and Chapter 7 for the use of Max Stirner's definition of ideology (ideas are what you have, ideologies are when ideas have you).

I am to respond to the richness and texture, of the critical ethos and lived world of the interventions of anarchistic currents, with a correspondingly textured writing (as advocated by Geertz in his notion of 'thick description') I write as an (observant) participant and as a 'public intellectual'. My role as 'public intellectual' is however carried out in a form which rejects the separations of public and private which I see as aspects of dualistic Western culture; in other words, the positions I promote in the public sphere are those I attempt to recreate in my personal life, and I foreground conviviality and social relationships<sup>8</sup>. The lived world and ideas of the anarchistic currents that are the focus of this thesis question fundamental elements of contemporary conditions - capitalism, hierarchical relationships, the state, civilization, the 'society of the spectacle' - in short, all the elements which now shape our lives globally.

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<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see the Appendix on Methodology

## **Chapter 2**

### **Anarchy in the UK: anarchistic currents**

This thesis explores some key interventions which have as their common ground a familiarity with the Situationists, and a desire to go beyond both anarchist and Situationist traditions, while drawing on these as a common influence. The shorthand term 'post-S'ituationists' is sometimes used to refer to them. Such projects depend on, and intersect with, a broader set of circles which broadly consist of the anarchist 'movement', a set of interlinked currents. This chapter forms an ethnography of anarchistic currents, exploring the lived world and the role of texts which constitute contemporary anarchism.

This chapter foregrounds experience, and draws on descriptive and experiential accounts of my own and others to convey something of the richness of lived anarchistic worlds. This lived current does not divide neatly into concepts and sociological categories such as 'individual', 'group' and 'collective action', and the majority of anarchists do not associate with any named group. The chapter, taking different vantage points, weaves through different levels, moving between the individual's experiences and descriptions of events. The chapter also addresses the stereotype of anarchists as outsiders or misfits, the process of forming a radical perspective, how anarchist currents allow individuals to create social relationships and participation, and the role of symbolic expression in action. Finally, the chapter looks at the role of texts, which, alongside the use of the internet, continue to act as a vital vector of ideas and a means of creating community – both with contemporary others and with the past.

#### **A metaphor of water and anarchist currents**

Though at times I refer to the anarchist 'movement' or 'tradition', the metaphor of water is an apt one to characterise the fluidity, ebb and flow, tides, eddies and ripples that form anarchistic currents. These exist amongst, and against, the 'mainstream', a commonly used term to denote dominant ideologies, discourses and practices. In my conception, anarchist currents are constituted by the acts and ripples created by individuals who are connected by, as John Quail puts it, a sense of community of 'emotional commitment' (Quail 1978 p.xi) to anarchistic ideals. This community of emotional commitment is informed by ideas, sensibilities, thoughts and actions, events and texts, and is underpinned by what I have termed the oppositional impulse (explored further in Chapter 5).

The image of water is commonly used to characterise anarchism. Brian Morris, anthropologist and writer on anarchism, outlines two ways of identifying anarchism - one as a river, an impulse, a sensibility, traced from hunter-gatherers and kin-based societies through Daoism, through the Spanish Civil War, to contemporary ecological and feminist movements (the other identifies anarchism as a historical movement from William Godwin in the Enlightenment onwards) (Morris, paper for the Anarchist Research Group, London,

19 10.1996). Peter Marshall, in his history of anarchism, refers to the 'river of anarchy' ('[Anarchists] all flow in the broad river of anarchy towards the great sea of freedom' (Marshall 1992 p.11). George Woodcock (1962) adopts the metaphor of water to begin the task of grappling with the 'essential theory' of anarchism. This is relevant to grappling with the task of evoking something of the lived world of anarchist currents and the individuals, ideas, thoughts, actions and texts which constitute them. Woodcock writes, 'To describe the essential theory of anarchism is rather like trying to grapple with Proteus, for the very nature of the libertarian attitude – its rejection of dogma, its deliberate avoidance of rigidly systematic theory, and, above all, its stress on extreme freedom of choice and on the primacy of individual judgement – creates immediately the possibility of a variety of viewpoints inconceivable in a closed dogmatic system...in the historical perspective it presents the appearance, not of a swelling stream flowing on to its sea of destiny (an image that might well be appropriate to Marxism), but rather of water percolating through porous ground – here forming for a time a strong underground current, there gathering into a swirling pool, trickling through crevices, disappearing from sight, and then re-emerging where the cracks in the social structure may offer it a course to run. As a doctrine it changes constantly; as a movement it grows and disintegrates, in constant fluctuation, but it never vanishes. It has existed continuously in Europe since the 1840s, and its very Protean quality has allowed it to survive where many more powerful but less adaptable movements of the intervening century have disappeared completely.' (1962/1975 pp.17-18).

Many participants in anarchistic currents are highly aware of the need for theoretical tools to conceptualise their interventions and the currents of which they feel a part, and actively engage in a continuous search for appropriate terms and metaphors. What I found intriguing was the apparently parallel and independent lines of thought which I encountered from several individuals who had arrived at the metaphor of water to describe what is traditionally conceived of as a movement. In 1989, at a meeting of the Anarchist Research Group, Tom Cahill spoke of the metaphor of water, with currents, eddies, ebb and flow, to characterise anarchism. An article written by a Reclaim the Streets (see Chapter 12) participant looked to writings by Harry Cleaver on the metaphor of water to describe the type of organising taking place between anti-capitalist grassroots groups, which is more 'amorphous and fluid form of communication' than is suggested by the term network (*Do or Die* no.8 p.9).

### **The use of the past**

Another important element neglected in studies of oppositional currents is the way in which the sense of community and relationship which connects them operates not only synchronically but diachronically. Those involved relate not only to contemporary significant others but also to those from the past, as a source of inspiration, of learning and of theoretical tools to develop

insights on current theory and practice. My focus in this thesis is primarily on the relationship to the Situationists, as the most important 20th century theoretical influence in anarchistic currents. Nonetheless, a relationship with the past in anarchism draws on other sources. It is criticised by some for its focus on the 19th century, and anarchist thinkers such as Bakunin and Kropotkin, and for continuously looking to the past for moments of self-organised autonomous movements (for instance Kronstadt 1921, the Spanish Civil War).

### **A brief history of anarchist currents**

In one definition, anarchism would seem to emerge as a practical creed 'when the masses move and suddenly feel their power' (Quail 1978 p xi). As a self-conscious movement, its inception is located variously from Godwin in the Enlightenment or from the ideas of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with precursors found in movements from the Free Spirit, a heretical Christian movement from 13<sup>th</sup> century, and the Ranters and Diggers of 17<sup>th</sup> century (Woodcock 1962; Marshall 1992; see also Guerin 1970; Oliver 1982). It has experienced key phases of revolutionary practice, notably before and during the Spanish Civil War 1936 (Richards 1953, Dolgoff ed 1974, Borkenau 1937, Brennan 1943, Bolloten 1979); the movement of Makhnovists in the Ukraine 1918-1921; the uprising in Kronstadt 1921 (Guerin 1970).

Anarchism as a conscious movement has undergone a resurgence at times in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century: in the 1960s, when the libertarian ethos raised its profile; during the late 1970s, with the interest created through punk; in Britain during a period of anti-Thatcherism and anti-poll tax around 1990; and during the late 90s and early 00s, when a grassroots coalition of indigenous and anarchistic environmental currents helped establish a growing anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation movement (see Chapter 12).

### **What those in anarchistic currents do, and the role of texts**

The act of writing, reading and publishing forms an essential element<sup>1</sup> in oppositional movements, not least anarchistic currents, in which the do-it-yourself ethic of self-organisation and autonomy is a guiding principle. This element, and the role and content of texts produced, tends to be neglected in studies of oppositional currents. The content of texts, as communications of critiques of the world and visions of alternatives, is foregrounded in this thesis, as is indicated by the chapters focussed on periodicals. Further discussion on the role of texts is taken up at the end of this chapter

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<sup>1</sup> There is a saying quoted by anarchists 'What happens when two anarchists get together? They publish an anarchist text' There is certainly a strong motivation towards independent publishing, and a desire to print, or keep in print, texts which are seen as important in disseminating and developing anarchistic ideas. Some classic books and pamphlets have shifted imprints several times in three decades, as one imprint winds down and a new one takes up the task of maintaining it in print (for example Valerie Solanas's *SCUM Manifesto* has changed imprint three times in twenty years)

The metaphor of water, which conveys the fluidity and ebb and flow of anarchistic currents is sharpened by the understanding that oppositional movements are underpinned by a critique, an oppositional impulse, and reaction against the existing world. This tends to be neglected by an overly sociological approach conceiving of such currents as entities such as 'new social movements', which obscures their critiques, ideas and guiding oppositional impulse. The notion of an 'impulse' underpinning such currents is explored further in Chapter 5.

The anarchist 'community' is amorphous and separated to a large extent by distance, but it is more than an 'imagined community', in Benedict Anderson's sense (1983), since many of the individuals know, or know of, each other.

### **Anarchism defined**

Definitions of anarchism vary among its adherents, but disagreements arise more on the practicalities of action and differing visions of alternatives, rather than over the core definition. One definition, which claims to allow anarchism to escape the 'dustbin of history' created by postmodernism, refers to anarchism as 'the rejection of hierarchy and authority', as emphasising diversity, and as best seen as 'an approach, a critique, a set of questions to be asked about power relations, rather than a theory or a set of answers' (Greenway in Purkis and Bowen (eds) 1997 pp.176-7).

Marshall refers to anarchism as having come to describe 'the condition of people living without any constituted authority or government' (1992 p.3). Ward looks to numerous examples of human cooperation and mutual support in ordinary life as 'anarchy in action' (Ward 1988). Woodcock refers to the use of the past in constituting anarchist interventions as a conscious and active process engaged in the here and now:

'...essentially anarchism is ...here and now, learning the lessons of the past which true history can teach us...the future can take its shape from what we do and not from what we plan and project. For it is in the nature of real futures that they grow not from prophetic dreams, but from present actualities.' (Woodcock 1991 in Gunderloy and Ziesing eds p.107).

This appears to paraphrase a well known quote, often used by Colin Ward, from German anarchist Gustav Landauer, who wrote.

'The state is not something which can be destroyed by a revolution, but is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour; we destroy it by contacting other relationships, by behaving differently.' (from *De Revolution* 1980, quoted in Goodway (ed) 1989 p.16).

The creation of independent self-organised non-hierarchical interventions, which aim to form relationships that as far as possible create non-capitalist and non-authoritarian, non-statist formations, is a guiding principle of anarchism



## **Intersecting circles in Britain**

Anarchist currents are constituted by intersecting circles of those adhering to differing perspectives. The wide spectrum of approaches ranges from mainstream to primitivist, class struggle to pacifist, Christian to animal liberationists. Two examples of categories of anarchists are as follows.

Mainstream anarchism tends towards a continuation of anarchism from its 19<sup>th</sup> century roots with Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin, and has been developed through the work of writers such as Emma Goldman, Herbert Read, Colin Ward and Murray Bookchin. In the UK, Freedom Press would constitute an example of a mainstream anarchist collaboration – though the limitations of such labels as ‘mainstream’ also neglect the scope of Freedom Press in publishing a wide range of texts engaging with wider areas from radical environmentalism to the Situationists.

Class struggle anarchism, a significant component of anarchism in the UK, identifies with a traditional left workerist notion of working class struggle against the ruling class (with the middle class as their servants), while rejecting the hierarchical organisation of political groups, parties or unions. Class struggle anarchists are more likely than other anarchists to have affiliations with named organisations such as Class War, the Direct Action Movement or the Anarchist Federation (formally known as the Anarchist-Communist Federation). They tend to promote activism and to adopt a ‘spikey’ (direct action, non-pacifist) stance

Class War gained prominence in the 1980s through their confrontations with the ruling class, for example at Henley Regatta. Their paper parodied a tabloid newspaper, and they developed a style of ‘in-yer-face’ slogan which evolved out of punk slogans (and see Marcus 1989 for claims of the links between the Situationists and punk). Examples of slogans here are derived from pink stickers handed out at the ‘anti-election alliance’, involving Class War, in the lead-up to the UK election in 1997: ‘VOTE LABOUR FOR MORE OF THE SAME SHIT’, ‘FUCK THE ELECTION’, ‘VOTING CHANGES NOTHING’, ‘EVIL TORY BASTARDS’, and a poster with photographs of all three main party leaders with the caption ‘WANKERS’ (handed out at the Anarchist Book Fair 1996).

## **EVENTS AND MEETING POINTS**

Anarchist currents from time to time converge in large numbers for festivals, gatherings or book fairs. These are organised around anarchist principles of non-profit-making, though, as my descriptions of two events in Britain will convey, their capacity to transcend present conditions is limited, and they tend to reproduce the same experiences as other similar events in the Western world. My ethnographic descriptions of the book fair and a festival in Britain aim to offer a sense of the lived world of such gatherings, and I have consciously adopted a more colloquial form of language in order to convey something of my personal experience.

### **Anarchist events: USA**

There is a long history of intermittent regional anarchist gatherings from the early 1970s, which at times expanded, during the 1970s and late 1980s, into continental North American gatherings, attracting a wide range of interest groups (see for example a critical evaluation by Bob Brubaker, Chapter 11). An annual book fair, combined with discussion and social gathering, has been held in San Francisco since the mid-1990s. In 2000 and 2001, for example, several speakers headed discussions, including John Zerzan in 2000, and, in 2001, Jason McQuinn (who gave a talk on results of an *Anarchy* readers' questionnaire) and Wolfi Landstreicher (formally known as Feral Faun) on the insurrectional anarchist milieu (email 9 95.01 from McQuinn).<sup>2</sup>

### **Anarchist events: Britain**

There are sporadic occasions for larger gatherings of anarchistic individuals. An event well attended by those in anarchistic currents is the Anarchist Book Fair in London. This was started in 1981 and has been held annually at Conway Hall, London WC1. Prior to 1981, anarchist publishers and distributors were confined to taking stalls at the annual Socialist Book Fair.

### **Anarchist Book Fair: an ethnographic description**

I have visited the Anarchist Book Fair annually since 1989, and will draw on my observations to construct an ethnographic description.

The book fair has the imprint of punk rather than the 1960s hippy countercultural atmosphere. The punk imprint is conveyed by a predominance of urban scruffiness and hard macho images (for example black leather jackets) rather than floaty colourful peace/love/feminine images. The smell is of beer more than marijuana, and people, mostly male, drinking from large cans of beer are well in evidence. My teenage sons describe it as 'scummy', referring to the punky anti-aesthetic, and as rather like a 'seedy gig', which indicates its atmosphere as geared more towards a younger rather than older crowd, and as similar to that of a venue with music (with books instead of music, though music plays a role in the evening gigs, which have also included well-known stand up comedians such as Mark Thomas and Robert Newman). The effect of seediness and the anti-aesthetic, picked up on by my sons, derives from the general air of crowded stalls, clothing styles tending towards the old and scruffy as a statement of opposition to consumerism, piles of flyers, and the volumes of cheaply produced literature alongside more professionally designed books.

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<sup>2</sup> My personal knowledge and experience of anarchist currents in the USA is limited to one garnered from reading American periodicals and other texts and a correspondence with Jason McQuinn, editor of *Anarchy*. My understanding has therefore not benefited from my own 'observant participation' as it has in the case of currents in Britain.

Stalls, selling or giving away literature, flyers, books, and other merchandise such as music recordings and T-shirts, fill every space of the foyer, corridor, hall and even the stage of the hall. The stalls are mainly tables topped with texts, and so browsing is carried out face to face (but generally without much eye contact) and within a couple of feet of those 'manning' the tables. A couple of second-hand booksellers set out their stalls with a formation of bookshelves to provide more defensible space for browsers, though I noticed that this seemed to result in them being more anxious about the possibility of 'shop lifting', as they occasionally stood up rather suddenly to check things out.

The composition of stalls varies from year to year, and tends to reflect the shifting wider currents which intersect with anarchism. Over the years, the input from related spheres has shifted from new age travellers and the Stonehenge hippy convoy (typified by the person with dreadlocks and 'dogs on string') of the 1980s, to animal rights and animal liberationists (1980s to 1990s), the anti-poll tax campaign (1990), the anti-roads protest movement with groups such as Reclaim the Streets and Earth First! (1990s), anti-genetically modified food campaigns and anti-corporations (1990s), and the more general anti-capitalist currents (late 1990s, 00s).

The book fair co-ordinators organise a stall selling vegan food near the bar selling beer. Throughout the day, talks and discussions are held in other rooms and halls in the building of Conway Hall.

My experience is that events such as the bookfair reproduce the same forms of social relations which characterise other similar public events in modern Western life. Social interaction and meetings are subject to the same barriers and constraints experienced by most people in modern life. In other words, there is no evidence of a greater sense of community or openness or joy than in other similar modern events. The general scruffiness and overcrowding tends to make the book fair, from my point of view, less enjoyable than, say, a mainstream fete or fair. I have found, however, that it is on leaving the anarchist book fair and returning to the world of the dominant culture and established order of things, that I notice that I am returning to a world where others do not share my critique of the world. It is as though I cannot appreciate the experience of being in a large gathering of others with whom I share some common ground in terms of a critical response to the world, until the moment when I return to a world where that sense of shared ground is noticeably absent.

I explore further what that common ground is in the ethnographic discussion which follows on an anarchist festival in 1994.

#### **An anarchist festival:**

##### ***Anarchy in the UK: Ten days that shook the world, October 1994***

This was a series of events which brought anarchists from around Britain and various parts of Europe, contacted with the aid of internet, email and postal networks.

The idea for the festival originated with Ian Bone, founder member of Class War, who initially sounded the idea out on a few 'anarchist heavyweights', to use Clifford Harper's expression (Harper as one of the 'heavyweights'). Bone then got together a group of people to coordinate information about the festival, which was open to anyone to arrange an event, from discussions to performances, poetry readings to film shows. Though the notion of 'anarchist heavyweights', as characterised by Harper, suggests an informal hierarchy based on age, experience, degree of activity (and possibly gender, since the heavyweights were male, it is unlikely that such 'heavyweights' would have exerted much control over the direction of the festival, which was organised by a large group with diverse interests.

The programme brochure was a prime example of what one anarchist magazine calls 'crap-xerox-chic' (*Bypass Zine*) - stapled photocopied pages with handwritten as well as typed print, which reflects the limited funds available and the non-profit-making basis of the festival.

The festival attracted people, mainly young people, from other European countries, including autonomists, anti-authoritarians involved in the squatting movement mainly in Italy and Germany, who have continued to congregate in cities since their heyday during the late 1970s, when they advocated and practised 'free shopping' with the slogan 'can't pay won't pay'. The 'can't pay' ethic was also brought by some autonomists to the Anarchist Book Fair, which took place during the festival, and caused some dismay amongst stall-holders who tended to respond with 'well, what could you pay?'.

#### **The festival: accommodation and an autonomist bathroom**

The organising group arranged some accommodation for non-resident visitors to the festival - mainly in squats, with advice published in the brochure about London campsites and parks that are suitable to sleep in without a tent (suggestions were Hampstead Heath, Russell Square WC1 and Hyde Park: programme p.5).

An engaging scene of a temporary autonomist bathroom was described to me by one anarchist, Richard, who attended an event in Red Lion Square. When he entered the public toilets in the square, he found that two continental anarchists had taken over the basin area in order to have a stand-up wash, probably because they had been sleeping rough in a park, or staying somewhere without washing facilities. They had hung all their clothes on the door handle inside. As Richard entered, the door handle went down and all the clothes spilled on the floor. Richard was very apologetic and was intrigued to see the transformation from public toilet to makeshift bathroom - a creative but perhaps not very comfortable attempt to adapt the existing city environment to their needs.

The lack of a ready-made culture and of welcoming and free public spaces may have limited possibilities for the festival. On a couple of occasions during the festival, in Camden Town and near Red Lion Square, WC1, I saw groups of visiting anarchists, with their Anarchy in the UK

programmes in hand, looking rather lost, with nowhere to go. The groups of people looking for a space to get together with others or just spend some time would have benefited from some focal points with space for their needs. Such places are not easily available in the modern Western world except to those able to pay for them.

### **The festival and the 'brew crew'**

On the fringes of all anti-authoritarian events and protest are an element referred to as the 'brew crew' ('brew' as in Special Brew, the extra strong lager) or 'lunch-outs' (referring to their tendency to turn up wherever there is a free lunch, and with a play on the term 'out to lunch' which denotes someone with a demeanour which is not fully in control; see below and Chapter 12 for more on the presence of the brew crew). During the festival, the brew crew devised their own solution to the lack of public space in which to gather: they chose to hang around in two of the venues used during the festival - the 121 Centre in Brixton, South London, which during the 1990s was a squat used as an anarchist community/bookshop/cafe, and the CoolTan Arts Centre, another community centre used for libertarian projects. The mess created by the brew crew caused general annoyance, and one of the Bulletins published by the organisers put out printed apologies to both venues, together with a furious note:

'Nobody realised that a lazy bunch of socialites would turn up and make a mess of your respective buildings. These sit around do nothing types are looking for the next cheap gig or cheap beer and are not trying to help all of us with our festival. To all the bum, broke-ass crusty leeches on the dole who call themselves anarchists why don't you quite drinking so much and get off your filthy arse and contribute something. Big thanx to all those who have participated...and/or tolerated the stinky bastards who sit about and expect the rest of us to serve and entertain them.' (Anarchy in the UK festival Bulletin no.4).<sup>3</sup>

### **Festival events**

The Anarchy in the UK festival, October 1994, comprised of ten days of events, several running concurrently at different venues, from gigs by Penny Rimbaud, formerly of the anarchist punk band Crass to a poetry reading of libertarian poets, including Adrian Mitchell. A few of the events were rescheduled or cancelled, and, in one Bulletin, a letter, from 'Mr Angry' of Sheffield, criticises the lack of organisation and information about the events. The response

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The 'brew crew' were a presence too at the anti-road protests during the mid-1990s, and were daily ejected from protest sites such as at Crystal Palace (*Do or Die* no.8 p.158). At Claremont Road, the brew crew elements, attracted by the cheap communal catering and tolerant atmosphere of the occupation, created problems through petty theft, messing up art installations and rowdiness which 'resulted in conflict and occasional ejections; some of which led to violence' (*Claremont Road. A festival of resistance* 1995 p 9). A more positive side to their presence was articulated by one participant, who

from one organiser emphasised how much work had been put into finding venues, answering mail and writing and printing programmes, and invoked one of the strongest principles of anarchism - that people can organise things for themselves.

### **The festival: a diary**

Extracts from a diary of my own experience of some festival events are included here in order to convey the experience and lived world of anarchist currents.

#### *Day 1, October 21*

An anti-Criminal Justice Bill rally at Conway Hall. (The opposition to the bill, brought in by the Tory government as a repressive response to assorted countercultural activity from ravers to travellers, was instrumental in forging a coalition of people against it, including some from anarchist milieux.) One person reported that it was full of men shouting and trying to take over the microphone. Here is an example of anarchist events reproducing the same conditions of the current world (the convention of a rally, and competition, mostly by men, to make themselves heard).

#### *Day 2, October 22*

The annual Anarchist Book Fair (see also above). It is packed with people, including an extra element this year from continental anarchists and autonomists who are over for the festival. At two different tables, I hear book sellers patiently asking penniless continental anarchists, 'Well, how much *could* you pay then?'.

I have been asked to chair a meeting (probably because asking a woman to chair is more politically correct), in a small room upstairs at the book fair, on class struggle, organised by Martyn and John, both of whom were previously involved with Solidarity, the libertarian socialist group, and who I know from the Anarchist Research Group. During the meeting, both sides of the debate seem locked in traditional workplace notions of how change takes place. I take the role of chairing rather than contributing to the discussion because my views are so far from others attending that to raise them would be to skew the discussion into a different area. This indicates the high degree of differentiation amongst anarchists – a traditional class struggle perspective alien to my own fusion of ecology and environmentalism, holistic alternative therapeutic and Situationist ideas.

In one hall, Colin Ward, an anarchist writer of renown, gives a talk on fundamentalism, arguing that fundamentalism is a reaction to the destruction of local culture by global capitalism.

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mentioned their fearlessness in confrontations with the bailiffs during evictions to make way for the road (*The End of the Beginning: Claremont Road E11 not M11*).

Another talk, on May 68, is given by a French member of the March 22 committee at Nanterre University in May 68. The French man was asked to give the talk after Martyn (of the class struggle talk as above) met him when on holiday in the French Pyrenees. The talk, given in French with a female translator, emphasises a point frequently made – that no one could have predicted the upheavals at the time since political organisation in France then was rigid and conventional, involving large unions. The talk highlights both the relationship with the past (a key theme in my thesis) and the strong interest in May 68 and its significance as a key moment of history in which anarchistic sensibilities found expression and which brought the state temporarily 'to its knees' (see also Chapter 3)

In the evening I meet another person who I originally met through the Anarchist Research Group. We have to walk a long way before finding a pub which is still open and not too packed because of the extra anarchist presence in the area. Two pubs near Conway Hall have decided to shut as, the staff tell us, there are too many people from the book fair and they can't serve them all; I think it is rather that they don't like the look of so many scruffy anarchists.

#### *Day 3, October 23*

There is a 'Levitation of Parliament', a demonstration with the aim of concentrating energy to do the 'levitation', at 2pm. There are two different programmes giving different places to meet – Jubilee Gardens and Parliament Square – so flowing over Westminster Bridge are anarchists going in both directions. One has 'Alien Sex Fiend' written on the back of his leather jacket. My 12 year old son informs me that this refers to a *band* rather than a personal label. There are about 200 people outside the Houses of Parliament, and many people milling around, but it seems to be slow starting and I have to get back home. When I get home, I find that I've forgotten that the clocks have gone back for winter, and this explains why the demonstration had not started, because I was an hour early.

#### *Day 5, October 24*

I go to a discussion about pornography and censorship, organised by 'Smutfest', which claimed to 'break the boundaries between sex and art', the main organiser of which was Tuppy Owens (known for her regular 'Sex Maniacs' Ball' and 'Sex Maniac's Diary' spanning two decades). It's in a fringe art gallery in Islington, and is packed with about 200 people, mostly men, and full of smoke

A panel of speakers appear to be people connected professionally with pornography and performance. Most of those in the audience are recognisable as anarchists from their self-presentation and clothing, which ranged from men in kilts to men or women wearing Palestinian scarves (these are, in 2002, enjoying some resurgence, especially on stop the war demonstrations, the wearing of Palestinian scarves by Europeans dates from the 1970s, and their periodic reappearances tend to coincide with periods of escalation in Israeli oppression in

Palestine; the scarves therefore have an important signification of solidarity with Palestinian people, and by extension all oppressed people).

The Smutfest speakers know nothing about anarchism or the do-it-yourself ethic, and focus their discussion on pornography and censorship around import and export and how to get their material onto the top shelves of W.H. Smith.

Most anarchists seem bemused by this from the outset, since there is generally at such events some understanding of the anarchist ethic of creating an alternative self-organised culture. This bemusement is finally voiced when one anarchist, a young man with retro-punk hair (dyed pink and cropped with a 'mohican'), wearing a long tartan skirt and lace-up boots, announced that what all the speakers were talking about was 'all about capitalism and has nothing to do with anarchism which is about doing things for ourselves'. This draws verbal support from many in the audience.

A woman on the panel of speakers however misunderstands what he has said and asks, 'But if we did magazines ourselves, who would we get to print them?'. No-one replies, presumably astounded at the question, since anarchists have a long tradition of and experience in getting magazines and books printed cheaply and distributed outside of mainstream printing and publishing companies.

This scene, and the exchange of views, illustrates some of the common philosophies amongst anarchists. The punk-styled young man identified himself and his friends and others in the audience as anarchists, and immediately identified what, in the focus of the discussion by the (non-anarchist) panellists, was wrong from an anarchist perspective. For him some defining elements of anarchism were: a critique of capitalism and the rejection of interventions for commercialism and profit, in contrast to the pornographer panellists' capitalist and commercial concerns with getting their magazines through customs and onto the shelves of W.H. Smith newsagents. He opposed this with one of the principles of anarchism, which is the *do-it-yourself* principle of people acting for themselves and organising interventions *outside* and independently of mainstream capitalist systems.

The fact that the panellists were unschooled in anarchism rather blocked what I presume most anarchists were there to hear - which would have been a genuine debate about the place of pornography and censorship in libertarian DiY activity. Anarchist perspectives on this topic vary in a similar spectrum to debates amongst feminists ranging from the view that pornographic images are an aspect of modern life which must not be subject to censorship, to opposition. (The anti-roads protestor, Swampy, who became a media star through his tunnelling during the mid-1990s, had, before his fame as a protestor, been involved with others in actions to remove pornographic magazines from the shelves of branches of W.H. Smith, to express his opposition to pornography - as he said in one newspaper interview, "Why can't people just use their imaginations?" )



*Day 6, October 26*

I go to a launch at Conway Hall of a new anthology anarchist poems, *Visions of Poesy*. On the way from Holborn tube station I notice a couple of huddles of continental anarchists who have gravitated to the area round Conway Hall as a home base (for the lack of other public space).

There is a Class War meeting in a smaller hall, packed with macho-looking men and a few not dissimilar women. I put my head round the door, and see that the meeting is very serious, and contrasts with the humour of their paper (a point picked up again in Chapter 6).

There are about 50 people at the poetry reading, and about 15 people who read poems (and I notice that their participation is minimal because most of them leave as soon as they have done their bit of reading). Early on I notice a member of the audience because she does ear-piercing two-finger whistles after each poetry reader finishes, and calls out responses which are difficult to understand because she has a deep, hoarse and very croaky voice. She's very young, about twenty, has a dog with her, and looks like a traveller or a 'crusty', except that her style is more eccentric. It's difficult to see what she looks under her bright red tinted hair and her clothes, which are a jumble of assorted layers, with one bare arm which is patched with mud (a style common in the mid-1990s, probably inspired by the mud which became an inevitable feature on the skin of those at anti-road protest sites). When Adrian Mitchell, the libertarian poet of renown from the 1960s, begins reading she interrupts him to say something. Everyone looks round. Mitchell looks slightly annoyed and alarmed. It turns out that all she's saying, in a croaky voice that obscures her generosity, is that Adrian Mitchell is wonderful. The alarm clears from his expression, he says 'Bless you', and carries on reading his poems.

A few poets later, a small elderly man comes on and does a dada-style performance, with old supermarket bags full of props like bits of bread. At times he shouts his poems angrily, stamping his feet. The eccentrically-styled young woman's dog responds to the poet with the same anger, and tries to attack him twice. Each time the young woman tries to calm her dog in a croaky voice.

I have tended here to note the eccentricities, which obscures the fact that the majority of the audience here showed the same range of identities as most functions in British culture. The presence of more eccentric identities, however, does highlight the way in which those who style themselves around an oppositional stance are attracted to the libertarian tolerant ethos of anarchist currents and events.

### **Anarchists as outsiders**

My discussion of the festival has touched on the presence of the 'brew crew', and marginal identities, such as the young woman with mud on her skin at the poetry reading (who may have been residing at an anti-road protest site, or at the Rainbow Community, a squatted church at the time in Kentish Town, London). This raises the question of stereotypes conjured up in

mainstream perceptions. Alternative oppositional currents are often perceived stereotypically as being homes for 'outsiders' or 'misfits'.

I want in this section to look further at those 'lifestyle' anarchists, whose presentation expresses their rejection of mainstream society, to consider the range of identities connected to anarchist currents, and to evaluate what participants draw from their engagement with oppositional ideas.

To explore further the notion of 'outsider' or 'misfit' as perceived by the mainstream media, I look at two illustrations. One example is a television documentary on the Danish free community Christiania. The presenter (Angus Deayton, known for his humorous touch) posed the question, 'What would you say to rude people who say you are just a bunch of social misfits?'. The Christiania member replies that they are trying to create a place where it is OK to be a misfit ('Happiness' Channel 5 1995). In another example, a newspaper piece on protestors who set up a site at Manchester Airport to oppose airport expansion, describes them as 'politicized outsiders'. The journalist who interviews them however alludes to the protestors' experience, their references to their sense of community, importance and identity in the world they have created, in which 'everybody has a function and an importance, and no one does not belong - where there is no such thing as misfits' (Gerrard, 1997 *Observer Review* p.4). This reference to a world in which individuals feel a sense of belonging, and in which there is no such thing as misfits, suggests that the experience of being a misfit derives to a large extent from the conditions of life in a competitive world of modern capitalism, which an individual can resist through a refusal of the usual conventions which indicate belonging to that world. The act of contacting others and creating alternatives is one means of overcoming the status of misfit.

### **The experience of being an outsider and the its role in taking up oppositional ideas**

The sense of personal identity as outsider or misfit may be one precondition for an attraction to or openness to radical ideas, since an experience of not belonging heightens the capacity to evaluate the existing world and to imagine an alternative, which is a core principle of those who form a radical perspective. An individual who has absorbed dominant values and ideologies uncritically may dismiss feelings, of alienation or the sense of not fitting in, as those which threaten failure, and strive to over these through effort or to escape contradictions via the distractions of work, consumerism and entertainment which are the pillars of modern Western existence (theorised for example by Situationist Guy Debord as 'the spectacle').

An individual who becomes aware of the historically specific conditions of contemporary global capitalism, of states, governments, hierarchical relations, modern institutions, potentially has the tools to identify which aspects of their lives and any feelings of frustrations and alienation are located in the system itself, and therefore may begin a process of perceiving these as neither purely personal and psychological in origin, nor inevitable

Radical currents, though they may attract those with identities which are powerful suggestions of the stereotype of 'misfit' (the 'brew crew', see above, being one example) are composed of a range of identities which span the spectrum of those in modern society: from 'respectable' males with well-paid work (and the signifiers of self-respect and status betokened by jacket and trousers), to the identity which aims to express in the strongest terms a rejection of the existing world, through old clothes and dreadlock-hairstyle. During the mid-1990s there was a fashion amongst countercultural types for mud worn on the skin - either there as a result of living on a protest site and not having facilities for washing, or, failing this, it was applied to the skin.

### **The rejection of careerism**

There is a tension between those who desire only to participate in independent activities out of the mainstream world of career and competition, and those who want to tailor their views in order to broadcast them in the mainstream media. An argument illustrating this tension was evident on one Internet site, between Squall, an independent alternative news group, and George Monbiot, a journalist who had participated in Reclaim the Streets demonstrations a few years earlier, and who writes for *The Guardian* and appears on television discussions to argue for environmental positions. Squall accused Monbiot of 'selling out' (2000-1) (<http://www.squall.co.uk>).

Others appear to retain their radical credentials and perform in careers deemed successful in the terms of contemporary values, as is indicated by the number of academics and other professional roles outlined in the biographies above and in other chapters.

Another example is Cornelius Castoriadis, libertarian socialist and key figure in the group Socialisme ou Barbarie (see Chapter 3), who balanced a successful career as a psychoanalyst and writer, also respected in academic circles, with his commitment to radical transformation. He pre-empted the view that radical ideas are a knee-jerk response to failure to adapt to the existing system when he writes:

'Like most people I *can* live in this (society) and adapt myself to it - I am, anyway, existing in it. However critically I look at myself, neither my capacity for adaptation nor my response to reality seem to me below the sociological average.' (1964 p.3).

### **The process of forming a radical anarchist perspective**

The discussion above raises the question of how individuals arrive at radical perspectives. In order to explore this further, I want to address Castoriadis' theoretical conceptualization of this process in Western culture, by considering his notion of the 'germ of autonomy'. I then move to a discussion of the initial conduits to a radical perspective, including texts.

The power of dominant culture is effective in any society to inscribe the dominant values and attitudes which support the prevailing order of things. The need for belonging and for cultural

and social connectedness is strong in humans, who do not automatically question, reject or oppose the world in which they live.

Castoriadis has theorized the 'germ of autonomy' as found in the modern West as one of two historical moments (the other is ancient Greece). In these societies it becomes clear that the 'laws' determining society, and its institutions and representations are not God-given or Nature-given and cannot be imputed to a supranatural force. It therefore becomes possible to question and change these laws. Almost all other societies, Castoriadis argues, are heteronomous - seeing the laws of society as coming from outside of it - and therefore do not have the possibility of autonomy. For Castoriadis, the modern West, in which lies the germ of autonomy, has more or less broken the power of socialization that binds the individual in 'heteronomous' societies to carry on as the effective concrete bearer of that society and its instituted laws - that is, in the modern West, the bonds which reproduce and perpetuate that society and its instituted laws, are broken (1991).

Castoriadis exaggerates this rupture, since in the modern West the laws and institutions governing modern societies, though not generally seen as determined by God or a supranatural force, are nonetheless presented by dominant discourses as inevitable and natural, the result of a new belief, as powerful as a religious one, of progress, development and change, driven by beliefs in the inevitability of the profit motive, money, competition, and institutions from schools to prisons to governments.

Castoriadis's argument therefore tends to overlook the continuing power of modern 'socialization processes', institutions and a self-censoring media in *constructing* and *maintaining* the individual as the concrete bearer reproducing society in all its complexity, and increasing destructiveness. Castoriadis's notion of the 'germ of autonomy' is nonetheless useful in indicating the potentiality for competing perspectives to exist, allowing the individual to encounter, or actively seek out, ideas which resonate with an already felt critical response to the world.

Barrot (see Chapter 5) theorises the experience of radical opposition to the world as emerging from the emotional need for human community. Taking up a humanistic perspective, he writes.

'These ideas (ie radical communist ideas) do not come from nowhere; they always appear because the symptoms of a real human community existing emotionally in every one of us. Whenever the false community of wage-labour is questioned, there appears a tendency towards a form of social life in which relationships are no longer mediated by the needs of capital' (1974 p.61)

Barrot's conceptualisation is lodged in a historical perspective which identifies (in Marxist terminology of wage labour) the particular conditions characteristic of modern society, in which everyone who does not have inherited wealth and land is a wage-labourer, ie has no other access to livelihood other than through selling their labour. Following Marx's analysis of the alienation experienced through this condition, Barrot posits the emotionally experienced need for a real



human community unmediated by the needs of capital. This indicates an emotional response (perhaps not always perceived cognitively or intellectually) to the mediations imposed by capitalism on human experience and relations.

An example of this opposition to the mediations imposed by capitalism is the argument made by the young anarchist, at the Anarchy in the UK festival event on pornography, for a do-it-yourself ethic that counters capitalism.

Barrot's conception of an a priori inner need for real human community is echoed independently by an American anarchist, who writes of anarchist aspirations as rising 'from deep within our psyche' and expressed in diverse ways from the communal lifestyles of decentralized societies to Lao Tzu, anarchist writers and activists to experimental communities (Kovin in Gunderloy & Ziesing 1991 p.30). This echoes the emotional/psychical level of desire for non-hierarchical, unmediated communal social relationships expressed by Barrot. This is explored further in Chapter 5.

Castoriadis himself writes of the experience of taking up and acting on transformatory oppositional attitudes, which I quote at length since it forms a personal statement of the subjective, emotionally experienced, responses to the existing world, to the desired transformation of that world, and of the motivations underpinning oppositional action:

'...I wish, and I feel the need to live in a society other than the one around me...in everyday life, as it impinges on me and upon others. I find myself up against a mass of things I can't accept. I say these things are not inevitable, and they depend upon the way society is organised...I want to meet others, as an equal, and yet as someone absolutely different, not as a numbered object, not as a frog perched on another rung (whether higher or lower is of little matter) in the hierarchy of income and power.' (Castoriadis 1964/1982).

#### *Initial conduits to an anarchist perspective*

The discussion above relates also to the question of what experiences and tools provoke an interest in radical anarchistic ideas, and allow the 'germ of autonomy' to be realised. Radical ideas are marginalised from mainstream discussion and media, and consequently the opportunities for encountering more critical views are limited.

For some, the initial interest stems from an encounter with the word 'anarchism' or with a person who identifies with its principles. Stewart Home, for example, heard the word 'anarchy' through his involvement with punk, in which the term was used in slogans and songs such as 'Anarchy in the UK' by the Sex Pistols, and he explored its meaning from dictionaries and other sources. Ramsay, founder in the 1980s of AK Press and Distribution, the largest distributor in the UK, now with an outpost in San Francisco, became interested in anarchism during his teenage years, when he was a fan of the punk band Crass.

Ian Bone, a founder of Class War, ascribes his awareness of class oppression to his father's position as a butler; he describes his first encounter with anarchists on a CND march, when a group seen by some as troublemakers, and described to him as anarchists, caught his interest.

Brian Morris's first encounter with an anarchist was at a conference on education (at Conway Hall, the libertarian venue in London), where an anarchist, who argued for children's rights, aroused Brian's interest in anarchism, which he followed up through books from Freedom Bookshop.

There are occasional examples of the intergenerational transmission of ideas. Vernon Richards, for example, founder of Freedom Press and Bookshop, and who was active in the revival of anarchism from the 1930s till his death in 2001, came from a familial background involved with anarchism. His father was a friend of the Italian anarchist Malatesta. As a young man, working as an engineer, he married the daughter – the writer Marie Louise Berneri – of another renowned Italian anarchist, Camillo Berneri. 'Daniel' was aware that his grandfather knew Rudolf Rocker in London (Rocker was an anarchist of German birth who spent many years in exile in the east end of London); 'Daniel' however is not certain how much influence this factor brought to bear on his own interest in anarchism and radical environmentalism (in 1991 he was co-organiser of a tour of the UK by Murray Bookchin, and he now works for an international ecological centre).

For many, the initial conduit to anarchist ideas is through texts, sometimes while at college or university. 'John' began buying books from an anarchist stall at social functions at York University where he was a student; an autobiography of Russian anarchist aristocrat Kropotkin took on special significance for him since it appeared to provide a role model and identity which reconciled a wealthy family background, which formed an aspect of his class identity (his family is also descended from Thomas Malthus, the 19<sup>th</sup> century writer on population), with a radical anarchist identity.

'Richard' first encountered anarchist ideas while browsing in a Cambridge bookshop, where he found a book by Daniel Guérin; he read widely on anarchism and the Situationists, and, on moving to London, made contact with others associated with these currents. 'Michael', who went on to publish texts relating to the Situationists and May 68, under the imprint Dark Star, discovered anarchists texts while at art school.

Both 'Richard' and 'Michael', independently, described this experience in the same terms - of finding articulated in writing what they had always thought and felt, but which they had not known existed as a body of thought and practice.

An American anarchist writes of the process of recognition of ideas through reading texts, which provide

'echoes of ideas and sensibilities they had already reached quite independently. They told me that after discovering anarchist works they reacted with feelings of joy and relief. They realized then that they weren't alone in holding their "far out" ideas ..the written word is most influential

when it sparks this sense of recognition and expands existing, internalized thought and feelings enabling individuals to integrate their philosophic convictions into their lives.' (Kovin in Gunderloy and Ziesing eds 1991 p.30)

This experience might be compared to the description of a religious conversion. Anarchism however addresses social and material relations and avoids the language of mysticism or the placing of authority in a higher order.

### **Radical currents as a means of creating social relationships and participation**

Anarchist currents strive to create a more satisfying reality in the here and now. Anarchists events, however, tend not to transcend the prevailing experience of comparable occasions in modern life. Nonetheless anarchist currents, mediated by events, gatherings, and contact through other forms including writing and print, afford a sense of community and a set of social relationships with like-minded others.

Anarchists with whom I have spoken describe in positive terms their experience of a different reality created through the lived world of anarchist currents. Carol, for example, likened her relations with the anarchist movement to those of a 'family', a reconstructed set of family relations that extend beyond her immediate family of a partner and two children. Ramsay Kanaan sees an important element as being the 'social club' of persons known to each other through anarchist interventions and solidified through events. John Quail described anarchism as a social network, an address book, extending over national boundaries. (Personal communications in May 1998; 1989; 1995 respectively).

Another illustration of the sense of community can be seen from the reaction of sympathisers when anti-capitalist protestors are hurt or shot by police: the emotional distress experienced by some, and expressed through Internet bulletin boards such as urban75 ([www.urban5.com](http://www.urban5.com) July-August 2001) (see below and Chapter 12), indicates that the emotional links between persons, unknown to each other except through a common identification of anti-capitalist opposition, are comparable to those of an extended family, or at least a closely bonded ethnic group.

Another important element is the enjoyment derived from radical interventions. The late libertarian socialist Castoriadis, writing of his experience as a radical, demonstrates his awareness that, though transformation will not be fully achieved in his own lifetime, he derives enjoyment and the experience of transformation through his participation in radical currents:

'Even were the revolution to take place tomorrow, my wish would not be fully achieved within my lifetime. But that does not reduce me either to despair or to a state of catatonic rumination. Wanting what I do, I can only act so as to bring it about. And I am already partly fulfilling myself in the choice that I make of the main interests in my life, in the work and time I put into trying to change things - a work full of significance for me (even if I meet in it - and have to

accept - partial failure, delays, detours, tasks that have no meaning in themselves). I enjoy my participation in a collective of revolutionaries which tries to overcome the reified and alienated relationships of present-day society.' (1964/1982 p.3).

The experience of a different reality via oppositional intervention is also identified in a journalistic account of the Manchester Airport protest. Gerrard describes a world where 'even the vocabulary is different', where people speak of 'an exultant sense of purpose and heroism, a childlike euphoria at breaking the rules', and where knowledge and everything is shared and direct action is experienced as 'empowering' (Gerrard 15 6.1997 p.4). This more intense level of community and shared purpose is relevant to a protest site where participants are engaged in common project of direct action, and sharing everyday life. Anarchist currents are constituted by a more diffuse, amorphous sense of community. Where that community is separated by distance, texts form a yet more important role in supporting the sense of knowing of like-minded thinkers. 'Helen', for example, an anarcho-primitivist living temporarily in a city in the south of England, knew of no-one in the city, apart from her partner, who shared her ideas, nor anyone she could talk to about them; in this situation, she spoke of her sense of community as deriving from key texts, such as those of John Zerzan, and her contact with like-minded others was primarily by email.

### **Anarchist currents as play and pleasure, and symbolic expressions in action**

Some anarchists support and/or participate in the waves of protest movements, from the anti-Poll Tax movement in Britain in 1990 to environmental direct action such as Earth First, and, in Britain, the anti-roads movement; as international links were made to grassroots movements, current opposition has connected as anti-capitalist protest, targeting world trade and financial institutions and summits. These movements have tended to glorify direct action as the primary goal. The movement however is self-reflexive - see the article 'Give Up Activism' on the fetishisation of activism, which is discussed in Chapter 12. Though a lengthy analysis of such action is outside the scope of this thesis, direct action and demonstrations form intermittent points of contact and symbolic expression for some anarchistic individuals, particularly younger ones.

The preferred term for many participants is 'carnival' Symbolic expressions evoking notions of play and pleasure are evident, as in the following examples Prague, September 2000, pink fairies with wands (temporarily forcing police backwards towards the conference centre where World Bank and International Monetary Fund representatives were meeting); huge inflatable weapons of the Wombles, May Day 2001, London; a water hydrant released in London, June 18 1999, drawing half-naked demonstrators to dance in and out of the water jet.

In such events, the order of things is disrupted, and an alternative mode of being is presented, one that demands to reclaim autonomy and subjectivity, expressed for example in the word



'HUMAN' written across the chest of one participant (May Day 2001; march for Kyoto May 2001).

The notion of a 'game' is used by some explicitly to conceptualise their actions. For example, one anti-road protester (like many also a qualified intellectual – in this case an MPhil) wrote of the approach to resistance in Claremont Road No M11 campaign as a game, 'an elaborate game, one which we had carefully prepared, a game to unveil power and make visible real issues' (Phil McLeish 'A view from the tower' 1995 *Claremont Road E11: A Festival of Resistance*). The Manchester Airport protesters, many of whom had been anti-road protesters, saw their actions as more like a game than a fight or an eco-warrior struggle (Gerrard 1997).

When violence breaks out at current anti-capitalist demonstrations, often as a response to police actions such as squeezing crowds in one spot (as in Euston Station, November 30 1999, May Day 2000 and 2001 in London, and Gothenburg (in a school) 2001) or by police throwing stones at demonstrators (Prague 2000, Gothenburg 2001), such events result in repression. Camatte has theorized this in terms of a cycle of 'provocation-repression' which casts the police in the role of invincible subjugators and keeps opposition on the old terrain of struggle (1980 p.17 and see Chapter 5). *Here and Now* has articulated critiques of actions such as riots (Chapter 8).

Some of those who oppose global capitalism's destruction of communities and the environment, and the pursuit of trade which is threatening the biosphere itself with global warming, have no faith in the commitment of power-holders to dismantle the system based on the pursuit of power and economic 'growth' (read environmental destruction). As one pamphlet expresses it, 'The holders of power are always beholden to power itself' (see Chapter 7). Anger and frustration underpins the more confrontational actions in anti-capitalist uprisings, and property damage (generally targeting overt examples of capitalism such as multinational corporations and financial institutions) is seen by those who support it as a symbolic act of protest. There has nonetheless in some circles been a tendency to fetishize activism and confrontation with the police (see for example the cover of *Do or Die* 9 illustrating a line of police confronting a line of demonstrators as though both are locked in grim struggle, and tending to fetishize confrontation).

There is further discussion about radical environmental and anti-capitalist strands in Chapter 12

### **The role of the internet**

The internet has helped network information about demonstrations and linked up grassroots movements internationally. An anecdote about the organisation leading up to June 18 1999 illustrates the internet as a rapid tool for international connections. an email relating to June 18 was sent by an international networking group in the UK to an anarchist group in New York,

who forwarded it to Chicago, who forwarded it to Boston and so on to several other cities in the US until eventually it reached Mexico City, where it was forwarded to Zapatista supporters in Chiapas, who were friends of the originator of the email in the UK but who had no idea that she knew anything about it (*Do or Die* 8 p.7).

The internet also acts as a point of contact between like-minded people. Internet sites (such as Urban75 initiated in the UK) allow exchanges of messages and debates, and independent new sites (such as indymedia, Schnews and Squall) provide independent sources of news information on oppositional issues. An anecdote illustrates the means by which information can be networked rapidly: when three protesters were shot in Gothenburg, June 2001, leaving one of them fighting for his life, there was a black-out on information in the mainstream media. Those who sympathised generally with anti-capitalist concerns were shocked; some demonstrated outside the Swedish Embassy in London; some people expressed their concern (for example [www.urban75.com](http://www.urban75.com)) and appealed for more information to be networked. After several days, one person posted details about the boy who had been critically injured,<sup>4</sup> and included the address of his father, a Professor and member of Swedish Doctors Against Nuclear Weapons, for those who wanted to express their sympathy and support. This information was not to be found in the mainstream media, and it would have been difficult to network it as rapidly without the internet.

The role of the internet in preparations for an anti-capitalist action, June 18 1999, is discussed in Chapter 12. The use of the internet however has not eroded the role of texts, which forms the focus of this thesis. The impact of one article, 'Give Up Activism', discussed in this thesis (see above and Chapter 12), occurred through print more than through the internet. It was widely read in its original form, in a discussion pamphlet printed after June 18 1999 in Britain, and translated into several languages and appeared in print in French, Spanish and America, as well as appearing on-line (*Do or Die* 9 pp.160 and 166).

## THE ROLE OF TEXTS

Texts have historically played a part in oppositional movements from the 13th century, when the Free Spirit, a millennialist movement, produced an 'abundant doctrinal literature of their own' (Cohn 1957/1970 p 149). The Diggers and Ranters of the 17th century also produced writings, benefiting from the lifting of restrictions on licenses on printing presses during the Interregnum (Hopton ed 1987 and 1989). The writings of these movements were considered

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<sup>4</sup> The 19 year old recovered, though lost one kidney and his spleen as a result of his injuries. The policeman who shot him was not charged. The protestor, who was a long distance away from police when he was shot, and who was shot in the back while running away was charged with assault

([www.urban75.com](http://www.urban75.com) m August 2001)

powerful heretical works and most texts were seized and destroyed or burnt (Cohn 1957 1970 pp.149-150).<sup>5</sup>

William Hazlitt claimed that one of the conditions which allowed the French Revolution to take place was the printing press. It also played a part in disseminating the ideas of 19th century socialists and anarchists from Owen to Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin and Herzen.

Pamphlets have also played an important part in the spread of anarchism in Spain from the late 19th century and in the 20th century, and texts were read out to those in rural areas who could not read. Of the role of pamphlets, Voltaire remarked:

"What harm can a book do that costs a hundred crowns? Twenty volumes of anything will never make a revolution - it is the little pocket pamphlets they should fear." Voltaire 1694-1778' (AK Distribution Catalogue 1999 p.83)

Though books and periodicals are the most important form of anarchist publishing, pamphlets continue to form a significant proportion of texts in print (constituting 11 pages out of 128 in the 1999 catalogue of AK Distribution).

Walter J Ong emphasises how the store of knowledge, including historical knowledge, could be accumulated only through the use of writing and print (1982 p.155). He highlights too the paradox of writing - its deadness and fixity as assuring its enduring capacity to be resurrected into living worlds:

'The paradox lies in the fact that the deadness of the text, its removal from the living lifeworld, its rigid visual fixity, assures its endurance and its potential for being resurrected into limitless living contexts by a potentially infinite number of living readers.' (Ong 1977 pp.230-171 quoted in Ong 1982 p.91)

This paradox is relevant too to oppositional currents, in which the store of radical ideas accumulates, and is debated and transformed, through texts. These texts, as Ong argues, are dead rigid objects removed from the lifeworld and yet they allow the accumulation of radical ideas and histories to be resurrected into limitless living contexts by a potentially infinite number of living readers. The accumulation of ideas, knowledge, histories, through texts, enables a relationship to the past in order to construct and imagine the future, an important element in radical libertarian currents. This significance and content of texts, and their relationship to the Situationists as an important example of the use of the past, is explored in Chapters 5 to 11.

The following discussion outlines the most significant ways in which texts act as mediators of social contexts, as symbolic icons, as enabling a sense of community both between writer, reader and other readers, and as a means of constructing a sense of community diachronically as well as synchronically.

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<sup>5</sup> These movements are cited in anarchist histories as important precursors to anarchism (eg. Marshall 1992; Harper 1987)

Walter J Ong rejects the term 'media' since all forms of communication, including those mediated through print and electronic media, are directed towards an audience (Ong 1982 pp.175-7). This element in communication is confirmed by those with whom I have spoken about the act of writing and publishing, which is carried out as a communication with several known people in mind and a wider sphere of audience with whom the writer is familiar (eg Home 1989, personal communication).

This targeted audience for some includes adversaries as well as more like-minded circles (eg Bookchin's later work tends to target perceived adversaries within the anarchist movement: he opposes deep ecology with social ecology in *Which Way for the Ecology Movement*, and lifestyle anarchism with political anarchism in *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism*). This can spill over into the feuds carried out in print between rivals and adversaries, particularly in certain circles such as those of Stewart Home and Luther Blisset (see Chapter 9), and the British journal *Green Anarchist*, and around Bob Black in the USA. Those involved in such feuds tend towards vituperative rhetoric in their interventions, even if this, as in Home and Black's case, is intended to be humorous or ironic. To give a positive interpretation of this, it may allow individuals a sense of belonging by the intense communication afforded by a feud. On a more negative note, it may be symptomatic of a perverse pleasure in antagonism. The feuds of Home are explored further in Chapter 9.

### **Texts as a focus and as mediators of social contexts**

It is significant that in both Britain and the USA, texts play an important role as a focus of gatherings and events. In the USA, anarchistic and oppositional events always have at least one 'literature table' (see the chapter on *Fifth Estate* which describes an initial encounter between two anarchistic individuals at a 'literature table'). In Britain, the literature table is more likely to be referred to as a 'bookstall', and the existence of anarchist bookstalls at universities and colleges formed an initial conduit to anti-authoritarian ideas for several individuals referred to above (see above on initial conduits to anarchism), and for Rick Turner whose interventions are discussed in Chapter 7. Bookshops are another important place for initial encounters with oppositional ideas and a place to follow up interest (see above).

The fact that the most enduring and regular anarchist event in Britain since 1981 is a book fair also indicates the importance of texts as a focal point in larger social gatherings. Small discussion groups, such as the Anarchist Research group and the London Anarchist Forum, are also centred round a talk, previously prepared as a text, from one speaker. This focus on texts could be a symptom of a contraction in the movement of libertarian opposition, which would presumably see a flowering of other foci, such as music and dance. The experience of May 68 was one of more spontaneity, and was the last time in modern Western history in which public oratory performed an important role (Hayes 1997 unpub); yet even during the euphoria of the

occupations of the Sorbonne, stalls emerged selling old and current radical texts in the courtyard of the University (Solidarity 1968 p.25).

Even activist oriented interventions such as the current wave of regular anti-capitalist protests are supported by the preparation of texts, from flyers to evaluations (see Chapter 12).

Most anarchistic individuals have personal collections of texts which resonate with their ideas, and many with whom I have spoken have boxes of old radical books, pamphlets and periodicals which they do not have space for, but which they are reluctant to sell or throw away. This accumulation of objects is a typical experience for the individual in modern life. The collections of radical texts represent an important part of an individual's identity, because they form symbolic representations of ideas which offer support for an alternative way of life; for some they may therefore have added significance as compared with the usual objects which accumulate as part of living in modern consumerist society and the world of goods.

Some texts are particularly sought after, and individuals will pass information to each other about original editions of radical texts, or may purchase books for others where they are available at reduced prices. For example, Stewart Home told several people about a stock, kept under the counter at Compendium Bookshop, London, of original editions of Christopher Gray's *Leaving the 20th Century* 1974, which had turned up in the bookshop's basement (1989).

Radical texts then act as desirable artefacts about which information is passed in networks and circles of friends. Texts may also be used in a self-aware reconstruction of the past: in one social meeting, 'John' handed me a copy of a recently printed pamphlet on which he had worked, with a reference to a reconstructed past in which two 'comrades' exchange radical tracts; though I did not have with me any texts to exchange, and so the situation was not quite parallel, the interaction was a postmodern, self-aware, reference to a former time in which two radicals might, on meeting, exchange the latest political tracts.

Bourdieu's (1979) notion of 'cultural capital' for the purposes of distinction is relevant to the purchase and collection of texts, which form icons of distinctive identity, both within radical milieux, and as a means of differentiation from mainstream identities. The content however of such texts - their significance as articulating a critique of the world and envisioning an alternative - adds a dimension: their significance is not only for the purposes of distinction, but as a representation of the desire for transformation.

Texts, then, form a representation which symbolises a synchronic sense of community with like-minded others in a world where they are relatively few and may be separated by distance. Texts also offer the means of constructing a diachronic sense of community - with past theorists (such as the Situationists as the most important 20th century influence), and with radical libertarian movements and uprisings (hence the number of texts written, published and kept in print by anarchist presses on May 68 as a euphoric moment of anti-authoritarian expression and solidarity (see the following chapter).

Before turning to my discussion of the Situationists and May 68, I want to outline the significance of periodicals, since these form the main part of the material discussed in Chapters 5 to 11 which explore the content and use of the past in which the common ground is a familiarity with the Situationists.

## Periodicals

Periodicals, in bringing together responses from contributors and readers, form a more interactive communication of radical ideas. As projects spanning many years, their intersection with wider oppositional currents - from new age spiritual to radical environmentalism - is evident. Their contribution to debates within their pages is important: as AK Distribution catalogue acknowledges, for example, of the US periodical discussed in Chapter 10, *Anarchy*: 'its pages have been the centre of some of the most vital debates around at the moment' (AK Distribution Catalogue 2001 p.51).

One of the most important debates about deep ecology took place within the pages of *Fifth Estate* (Chapter 11), and debates on issues from nihilism to violence to cars are discussed in *Anti Clock-wise* (chapter 7).

The periodicals in this thesis range from photocopied stapled 'zines' to well-produced magazines. What links them is the sense of sustaining a project over time to an audience, and the interplay of dialogue, in print, that occurs between editors and contributors to the periodicals, and readers some of whom, though their own interventions in the milieu, have positions of some prominence in anarchist and related currents.

My focus on periodicals in Chapters 7-11 could invite the charge that I have tended to omit a sense of the lived experiential world – one of the criticisms I make of new social movement studies. I intend however to convey a sense of the lived world through my analysis of the texts discussed, which evoke the interplay of dialogue between contributors and readers. Texts also allow an understanding the *ethos* of oppositional currents and milieux to emerge via the medium of writing – the public communications, articulated after reflection, of the critical perspectives informing such currents. It is through communications, most clearly articulated in writing, that participants speak for themselves, though this is inevitably mediated through the selection process of both periodical editors and those studying them. Derek Wall's study of *Earth First!* (Wall 1999), for example, would have greatly benefited from such an exploration of key texts, ideas, attitudes and affinities that would have been afforded by periodicals such as *Do or Die* and even the activist-oriented newsletter *Action Update*. My focus on periodicals, then, in Chapters 7-11, is intended to allow the communications of perspectives and attitudes to emerge from their context of the periodical as medium. My own participation in anarchist currents, and encounters with different milieux, has allowed me to develop a sense of the context in which such communications in print are made, and my intention is to undertake an exploration of such

interventions, that is sensitive and attuned, albeit inevitably influenced by my own selection process and agenda.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter focuses on the broader anarchist movement, which forms an essential background to the main focus of this thesis, which is a study of the Situationists and the influence of their ideas on a significant sphere of anarchism. I have aimed to convey something of the ethos and lived world of anarchist currents, through descriptions of events such as the Anarchist Book Fair and the 1994 festival Anarchy in the UK.

I have also discussed the metaphor of water as a means of conveying the fluidity and the ebb and flow of anarchism, and the related notion of 'currents' which also denotes the relationship to the mainstream. The metaphor of water also alludes to the amorphous and diffuse nature of anarchism. The scope of this chapter, in attempting to cover as wide a ground as possible, as reflects this diffusion. Hopefully whatever coherence is lacking in this chapter is made up for in conveying the amorphousness of anarchism as a lived world – and the diversity of activities engaged in sporadically by those with, to quote John Quail (1979; p.xi), a sense of community of 'emotional commitment to anarchist ideals'. Those activities range from attending and organising events to an engagement with the past and anarchist moments in history; from publishing and reading, to the intermittent gatherings and expression of opposition on demonstrations.

Anarchists in certain cities have more chance of knowing like-minded others. The social milieux of anarchism in cities such as Liverpool, Glasgow and London are touched on in Chapters 7, 8 and both 6 and 9, respectively. Those living in smaller cities and towns may find themselves with few opportunities for contact with other anarchists of whatever sphere. For them, texts and the internet form the main conduits of a sense of community. See for example the experience of an anarcho-primitivist, 'Helen', above, and also Chapter 10 on the sense of isolation expressed by anarchists in suburbs of the USA.

In this chapter I discuss the importance of the past in constructing a sense of ancestors, such as Bakunin and Kropotkin, and the significance of moments in history when self-organised people's struggles, often self-defined as anarchist, such as in the Spanish Civil War, come to the forefront in opposing the state, capitalism and authoritarian communism.

The discussion emphasises the importance of the role of texts, writing and publishing, in the activities constituting anarchist currents.

Anarchism as a philosophy is a strand well excluded from mainstream media and public agendas, which raises the question of how individuals find their way to anarchist ideas. Castoriadis's notion of the 'germ of autonomy' is considered as to its relevance in understanding this process, as is Barrot's on the experience of radical opposition to the world as emerging from the emotional need for human community. The experiences of anarchists are

discussed to explore the different conduits to anarchism – one primary one being an encounter with anarchist texts, which attests further to one of the key themes in this thesis – the importance of texts in the dissemination of ideas.

It is self-funded, self organised anarchist presses that have translated and published the key Situationist texts, and texts on May 68, over the last decades. These form an important aspect of the discussion on the Situationists in the next two chapters. I explore in subsequent chapters the way in which Situationist ideas have found influence and how the past, as a repository of ideas, allows a sense of community, operating synchronically and diachronically.



## Chapter 3

### The Situationists and May 68

‘Cours, camarade, le vieux monde est derriere toi’

(‘Run, comrade, the old world is behind you’) (Gray 1975 p 102)

‘Le vent se leve il faut tenter de vivre’

(‘The wind is blowing, we must try to live’ )

Slogan on the wall at Nanterre (Salle C 20) May 1968 (Tchou 1968)

In order to explore the use of the *past* by anarchistic currents, I have chosen to explore interventions whose common ground is a familiarity with the Situationists, whose importance is discussed in this and the following chapter.

Situationist texts are the most important anarchistic theory of the 20th century (personal communication, David Goodway 1998) and constitute a key influence in anarchistic currents. In Britain and the USA, it was individuals in anarchist circles who translated and published Situationist texts, and maintained them in print. Though Situationist ideas drew on Marx and Lukacs, Situationist texts resonated with anarchists rather than more orthodox leftists because of their critique of hierarchical power (for example Vaneigem 1983 pp. 42-3) and their notion of freedom from authority and constraint (ibid p.46). The Situationists were pronounced by one journal in 1968 as ‘more anarchist than the anarchists, who they find too bureaucratic’ (*Carrefour* 8.6.1968, quoted in Vienet 1992 p.16n). Their influence continues also in more high profile activist-oriented anarchistic groups such as Reclaim the Streets, and the anti-capitalist movement which emerged in the late 1990s (see Chapter 12).

Situationist ideas, from their stress on the totality to their critique of everyday life and focus on subversive acts through play and detournement, are a key element in the common ground between the post-Situationist interventions discussed in Chapters 5-11, and form a theme through which I discuss how anarchistic currents create a sense of community by reference to the past and through the medium of texts

This chapter, in conveying the libertarian oppositional impulse which tends to be neglected in some sociological studies deriving from new social movement theory (see Chapter 1), forms an example of a lived, experiential world of opposition. This emerges particularly in the discussion of May 68, which analyses the wall writing and draws on the experience of one British participant. In the pronouncement of the Situationists about the events of May 68,

‘The occupations were a rediscovery of history, personal and social history.. a rediscovery of the sense that “history” can lie in the hands of ordinary people. The alien life everyone had been living eight days before just seemed ridiculous. The occupations were a *total attack* on

every form of alienation, on every form of ideology, on the whole straitjacket in to which real life has been crammed... The occupations... were playfulness, they were the real dance of men and time. Authority was rejected in all its forms. So was specialisation. So was hierarchical rip-off. So was the state. So were political parties. So were trades unions. So were sociologists. So were professors. So were moralists. So were doctors.' (*Internationale Situationiste* 12, 1969)

This knowledge of the past and past ideas – in Situationist texts and participants' histories of May 68, when the Situationists found their apotheosis – informs and inspires subsequent generations of radicals, and is explored in Chapters 5-12. The experience of May 68 forms an important historical moment, archived extensively by anarchist presses (eg. *Solidarity* 1968; *Vienet* 1992; *Dark Star* undated), in order to convey the expression of a radical libertarian impulse and bring this to the consciousness of those in contemporary currents.

The 'Situationist International' (SI) emerged in the 1950s from milieux informed by an avant garde influence originating with Dada and the Surrealists. The SI formed in 1957, through an initial collaboration between a breakaway group from a French avant garde group, the Lettrists, and artists mainly from Germany and Scandinavia (who had previously collaborated under the name, Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus). The Lettrists, formed in the late 1940s, had achieved some notoriety with their Dada-inspired actions of sabotage (for example in 1950, a small group entered the back of Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris, captured a priest; one Lettrist, dressed in the priest's clothes, began a speech from the pulpit, pronouncing 'Freres, Dieu est mort' ('God is dead'); the congregation chased him out. (Gray 1974 pp.3-4)). This bold and playful form of subversion links to sporadic playful oppositional activities carried out by anarchists, though generally without the note of contempt, for the everyday activities of ordinary people, that characterises avant garde interventions.

Debord was to play an important role with the lettrists in developing two key practices which were to become influential in the SI: 'la derive' (drifting) and psychogeography, interconnected conceptualisations to describe a drift through varied ambiances in which the usual purposes of destination, leisure and work activities are suspended, entailing 'playful-constructive' sensibilities and the letting go into the 'psychogeography' of a space allowing its currents to communicate (Debord 1958 *Internationale Situationiste* in Knabb (ed) 1981 pp 50-54). The Lettrists also introduced two further practices which were to become influential in the SI as a form of literary and oppositional expression - graffiti or wall writing (Gray 1974 p 5) and the strip cartoon (Atkins 1977 p.51). The strip cartoon and 'detourned' images from popular culture and advertising (detournement referred to the subverting of the original message) are characteristically used in all the post-Situationist interventions discussed in Chapters 7-11.

The term 'situationists' refers to the 'construction of situations', a notion developed to denote a means of creating participatory experience which breaks with the 'spectacle' and alienated social

life, allowing a contact with 'real' desires and creating a 'liver' rather than a 'spectator' (IS 1 1958 in Gray 1974 pp.13-1).

From the early 1960s, after a split with the 'artistic' faction of the group, and under strong influence from one member, Guy Debord, the SI rejected the avant garde tradition and became concerned to develop a coherent critical theory of the totality. By the mid-1960s, three key texts were produced which were to fall on fertile ground in the radical ferment of 1968.<sup>1</sup>

The SI was for some years an international collaboration with members from or living in France, Italy, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Algeria, Britain, and the USA. Over the 12 years of existence, it had 70 members in total, though not all at the same time, and nearly all of these were expelled, or resigned, often under threat of expulsion (Raspaud & Voyer 1971 p.14).

After the split with the artistic faction in the early 1960s, one artist, Jorgen Nash, set up a breakaway Situationist group 'Situationist Bauhaus' in Scandinavia. One event apparently carried out by them involved vandalising the mermaid statue in Copenhagen (the head was removed); this was reported in newspapers around Europe.

The SI, after the split with the artistic faction, was centred around Debord in Paris, and continued to produce the journal *Internationale Situationiste* which had begun in Summer 1958. Gray describes the impact of the journal, appearing around the Latin Quarter in Paris, evoking what he calls the brand of 'intellectual terrorism' evoked by the journal:

'Its contents were quite as terrifying as its name...Western culture and civilization in their entirety were, so it seemed, totally bankrupt...Why the maps of Utopian countryside?...And how could you feel such disgust with everything?' (Gray 1974 p.1)

The first issue of IS, an inexpensive glossy magazine with covers of different shades of metal board (ibid), set out their call for the liberation of desire, replacement for the banal life of consumer culture and work, and their critique of art, which was to be replaced by a new type of creativity in which the imagination should be applied to the transformation of reality itself, not to its symbols in the form of philosophy, literature, painting etc.

In Gray's words 'Most utopian visionaries since Fourier paled before the situationists' (ibid). The SI formed two important associations which influenced their ideas - with Henri Lefebvre and Cornelius Castoriadis; in using their ideas to develop a yet more radical critique, they then left them behind. According to Gray, Lefebvre was the SI's first 'mentor in social revolution' during the 1950s. The sociologist Lefebvre developed a critique of the poverty of everyday life in consumer society.. Though the notion of transforming everyday life became a central aspect of the SI's critique, their relations with Lefebvre deteriorated and they increasingly found his approach too academic and concerned with experimental research rather than with changing everyday life (Gray 1974 p 6)

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<sup>1</sup> These three texts were: *The Poverty of Student Life*, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* and *The Society of the Spectacle*

Another important influence was the libertarian socialist Castoriadis (who at the time wrote under the names Chaulieu and Paul Cardan), who was a leading figure in the Socialisme ou Barbarie (S ou B) group (of which post-structuralist Jean Francois Lyotard was also a member). Castoriadis continues to be influential in the anarchist movement, and the group Solidarity in Britain which existed from the 1960s to late 1980s formed an association with S ou B. S ou B redefined the class divisions classically defined by Marx, and conceived of the notion of order-givers and order-takers, emphasizing the bureaucratic state of both capitalist and the then 'communist' societies. S ou B also theorized the importance of workers' councils and workers' self-management, which continued to be a key element in Situationist theories, and in practice during the events of May '68 in Paris. S ou B was more involved in work-based struggles than the SI, whose critique focused on the totality of economy, social, cultural and everyday life.

Other influences include: Marx and the Marxists Lukacs and Korsch, Freudian-Marxist: Wilhelm Reich who fused Marx with psychological concepts such as the authoritarian personality and 'character armour'; the anthropologist Marcel Mauss whose notion of the 'gift' as an element in primitive exchange was drawn on as a contrast to commodity culture; and Huizinga, whose work on the human love of play in *Homo Ludens* was influential.

During the 1960s, the Situationists developed the concept for which the SI is best known - of the 'spectacle' - which Debord was to expound in his book. As Gray writes, 'By the mid-1960s the situationist project had taken on its definitive form. The SI was to be a small tightly knit group of revolutionaries devoted to forging a critique of contemporary, that is to say consumer capitalism - and to publicizing this critique by every form of scandal and agitation possible. All practical experiment with art went by the board. Everything depended on universal insurrection. Poetry could *only* be made by everyone.' (Gray 1974 p.84)

The SI made headlines in 1966 in Strasbourg University, where a small group of students had made contact with the SI, and got themselves elected to the left-wing students' union, whose funds they used to print radical texts. The most notorious of these was the printing of 10,000 copies of the pamphlet *On the poverty of student life: considered in its economic, political, psychological, sexual, and particularly intellectual aspects, and a modest proposal for its remedy.*<sup>2</sup>

The pamphlets were distributed at the official ceremony at the start of the academic year. The student union was closed by court order, and, through the publicity it provoked, the Situationists achieved notoriety and fame as Gray writes,

'The SI had become synonymous with the utmost extremism. It bathed in revolutionary charisma' (1974 p.16)

Most students by this time had heard of them, and many made contact with their PO Box number, and were encouraged to form their own autonomous groups (a practice advocated by

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<sup>2</sup> This was one of the first Situationist texts to be translated into English and has continued to be kept in print by anarchist imprints since

anarchist interventions in order to avoid hierarchical and centralised control) One group at Nanterre University was to become more closely associated with the SI, and to play a role in the events of 1968.

In 1967, two books were published which were to become key texts in the ferment that was 1968 - Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* and Vaneigem's *Revolution of Everyday Life* (see Chapter 4). It is to an account of May 68 that my discussion now moves

## MAY 68

Situationist ideas had achieved notoriety by 1967, and, though it is difficult to ascertain the extent of their influence in the events leading up to May 68, the Situationists were, as one participant put it, the 'people of the hour' during the events (Hayes personal communication 1999). It was a time when their ideas fell on fertile ground.

The occupations and strikes of May 68 brought the system and state to the point of collapse. There was a sense of discontent in France, which during the 1960s was experiencing a rapid modernisation process; as a more 'backward' country in terms of the ideology of capitalist modernisation, it was more in touch with a recent traditional past and rural life, and the impact of modern life and consumer capitalism would be sensed more keenly in France than, for example, in Britain and the USA. This, combined with a strong left-wing tradition in France and the eruption throughout the Western world of a countercultural and oppositional contestation of the system, predisposed France to a spontaneous uprising, initiated by students in Paris and quickly supported by a wave of strikes throughout France. The imagery of 'wind', 'fire' and 'lava' is frequently employed to capture the intensity of opposition which swept through the Western world and erupted in Paris: a 'wind of freedom' sweeping across Europe, taking to Paris all the seeds of revolt it had gathered (Rohan 1988 p.22); a 'fire has been lit' (Vienet 1990 p.22), the explosion of thoughts and aspirations as though a 'gigantic lid' had been lifted (Solidarity pp 23-24), some wall writing in the Sorbonne (Galleries Lettres) uses the image of a cork pulled out of a bottle 'Que saute le bouchon pour liberer l'énergie révolutionnaire des masses?' (Tchou 1968 p 99) ('What is exploding the cork to liberate the revolutionary energy of the masses?').

What is often forgotten in the mainstream media memory is the impact of the events, which came close to bringing the government and economy to a crisis point. The police, after an initially heavy and brutal intervention in the occupations at University of Paris at the Sorbonne, withdrew from the area. By 18 May, transport services - trains, bus, metro and air services - were discontinued. Television broadcasting was reduced to the news and the occasional old film (Koning 1987 pp 77-78, Rohan 1988 p 40)

The first spark to ignite the events culminating in May 68 occurred in Nanterre in 1967. Nanterre was a newly built secondary campus of the University of Paris. The Situationist Rene

Vienet, in a book on the occupations, saw the campus as the perfect environment for revolt, amongst its modernist high-rise flats and slums - 'a microcosm of the general conditions of oppression, the spirit of a world without spirit' (Vienet 1992 p.21).

Other factors involved in student unrest were the growing student numbers and university crowding, and the relative poverty of students. Rohan cites how student poverty appeared all the worse by 'living in a city which loved to show off the glittering temptations of the so-called consumer society' (1987 p 22).

Protests began at Nanterre from 1967. Key figures in the student protests were the German anarchist Daniel Cohn-Bendit, and a group of 'Enrages', including René Riesel, who had made contact with the Situationists and absorbed their critiques, and a group known as the 22 March Movement. Political meetings began to flourish in lecture theatres, and a manifesto rejected the university as part of the capitalist technocratic system. The university took disciplinary action against eight students who were instructed to attend a meeting of the Disciplinary Committee at the Sorbonne on 3 May - a day which was to spark off the escalating opposition and events of May 68. Four professors at Nanterre - Henri Lefebvre, Alain Touraine, Paul Ricoeur and Guy Michaud - were opposed to the disciplinary action and prepared to defend the students (Caute 1988 pp.68-71; Vienet 1992 pp. 19-24). Ironically, such professors were identified by radicals as supporters of the status quo.<sup>3</sup>

The Disciplinary meeting at the Sorbonne provoked protests and brutal reactions to them from the riot police, including the CRS, the riot police. More protests followed and the Sorbonne was occupied. A wave of strikes rippled over France, and the state 'ceased to function' (Koning 1987 p.77).

### **The Situationists and May 68**

Several Situationists, including Debord, Vienet and Vaneigem, participated in the occupations at the Sorbonne, particularly in the 'Conseil pour le maintien des occupations', a council based on the libertarian organisation of workers' councils, developed by radical communists such as Pannekoek (1940s), and taken up by both the libertarian socialist group Socialisme ou Barbarie and by the Situationists as a model form of self-organization.

A Situationist influence is at work particularly in the wall writing, which was written up both in the streets and in the occupied buildings, and which is discussed below. A journalist writing in 1971 notes the extent to which Situationist ideas prefigured those which were predominant in the libertarian radical ethos of the events.

'When one reads or re-reads the back numbers of the IS (the journal *Internationale Situationiste*), it is striking in effect, to establish to what extent and how often these frenzied

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<sup>3</sup> For example the Enrage René Riesel wrote a letter to the Council of the University of Paris in May 1968, addressing it to 'Relics of the past', and adding later 'Monsieur Lefebvre, I say to you shut'. The Situationist Vienet cites the 'Lefebvres and Touraines' as being among Nanterre's 'cretins of submissive though - the knaves of recuperation, the modernist nullities of social integration' (Vienet 1992 p 21).

*fanatics* passed judgement or exposed points of view which, afterwards, were conc etely verified' (Claude Roy 8 2 1971 'Les desperados de l'espoir' *Le Nouvel Observateur* quo ed in Debord and Sanguinetti 1974 p.36)

Another commentator, using the imagery of fire, also notes the impact of Situationist theory 'At the beginning of 1968, a critic, dealing with situationist theory, evoked, mockingly, "a little glimmer which wanders vaguely between Copenhagen and New York". Alas, the little glimmer became, the same year, a conflagration which blazed in all the citadels of the old world. The situationists have brought to light the theory from the subterranean movement which riddles the modern epoch...' (Bott, *Les Temps Modernes* 229 300, June 1971, quoted in Debord and Sanguinetti 1974 p.15).

Debord wrote before 1968 that 'Our ideas are in everyone's heads'. Nonetheless, no-one, the Situationists included, had predicted that the uprising would happen and have such impact (personal communication Hayes, 1999, speaking of his meeting during May 1968 of radicals including Debord and Vienet; member of the March 22 Movement, talk at the Anarchist Book Fair October 1994).

A member of Solidarity includes a paraphrase of Debord's pronouncement that 'Our ideas are in everyone's heads', when explaining the root of the student occupations:

'The "trouble with the University", for the powers that be, isn't that money can't be found for more teachers. It can. The "trouble" is that the University is full of students - and the heads of the students are full of revolutionary ideas.' Solidarity 1968 p.10)

I want to turn now to select key elements in the events of May 68 – the paving/cobble stones that form an icon of student resistance in the events, and the targeting of shops and cars as icons of consumer capitalism and the 'old world'. This discussion will also allow a sense of the lived world and experience of the events to emerge. I then move to an analysis of the wall writing, which appeared on walls, in paint and pen, all over the streets of Paris. The wall writing is important in capturing the ethos of the time and the expression of opposition which created a sense of common experience, a new lived reality in reclaimed space.

### **"Les pavés" ('Sous les pavés, la plage': (Under the paving stones, the beach) )**

The streets of Paris prior to May 68 were formed of 'pavés', long stones embedded in the sand to form a cobbled effect. The 'pavés', pulled up as ammunition by students resisting police, have become an iconic emblem of the occupations of May 68. One Situationist-derived slogan, appearing on walls at the time, has an important status among anarchist and post-Situationist circles for its ability to capture the ethos of the events, and the sense of a world of pleasure and freedom under the paving stones. The slogan is

'Sous les pavés, la plage' Under the paving stones, the beach.

The slogan is frequently alluded to verbally and in writing in anarchist milieux. It evokes the sense of a wild place of pleasure to be reclaimed from underneath the edifice of modern

civilization. Its significance also derives from the way in which, during the occupations and street fighting, the 'paves' forming the road were pulled up from the sand in which they were embedded to be used as barricades and ammunition against the police <sup>4</sup>

Students had found a pneumatic drill on a nearby building site, a passing worker showed them how to use it, and it was used to begin the process of disembedding the paving stones: once one was up, it was relatively easy to pull up the rest. Many of the streets were asphalted over after May 68 in an effort to prevent them being used in the same way again (Koning 1987).<sup>5</sup>

The 'paves' featured widely in wall writing and slogans. Posters include an image of a young woman hurling a paving stone 'Beauty is in the street'; an image of a street with half the paves ripped up, a rose among those remaining: 'Aujourd'hui l'important c'est le pave'. A few slogans on walls reveal an emotional and/or sexual passion connecting to the paves as a symbol of a new freedom: 'I love you!...Oh! say it with paving stones!!!'; 'I find my orgasms among the paving stones' (Rohan 1988 pp.76 and 86).

### **Shops and cars as targets and symbols of the 'old world'**

Shops were targeted as symbols of the commodity system. as Vienet puts it:

'many storefront windows were submitted to the critique of the paving stone' (1992 p 80)

Vienet states that there was little looting, which lends weight to the notion that such acts are motivated by the desire to smash symbols of consumerism rather than for purposes of stealing goods.

The smashing of shop windows has characterised many demonstrations from the Anti-Poll Tax riots of 1990 to Seattle November 1999, and all the subsequent anti-capitalist demonstrations; the most frequent windows targeted are those of multinational chains such as McDonalds and Starbucks coffee shops. In these instances, looting is not the primary purpose. An example of this is an anecdote which went round anarchist circles after the Anti-Poll Tax riots in London in 1990; an opticians had been smashed in and one participant urged the other to find a pair of spectacles to replace his existing ones, which were broken and held together with sticky tape; his companion refused, saying that this was not his purpose which was to be engaged in a protest against modern consumer culture

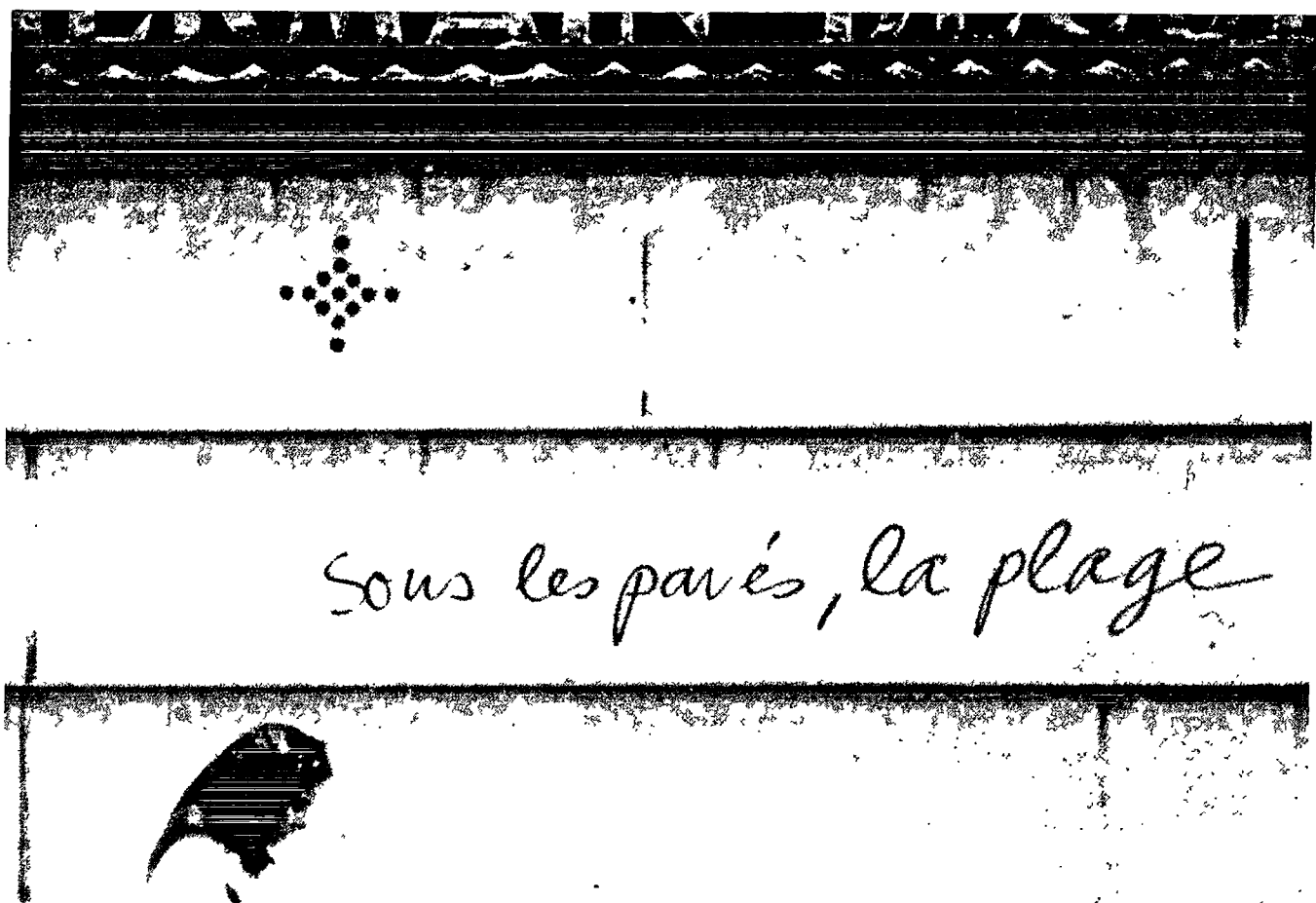
Cars are another target in contemporary protest movements, from the Anti-Poll Tax riots of 1990 to radical environmental and anti-capitalist protest movements of the 1990s and 00s, in which a number of cars are smashed or burned. Cars are the subject of rants spanning several issues of *Anti Crock-wise* (see Chapter 7). They were also the subject of critique by the Situationists in the *r* journal, and were attacked as powerful symbols of the 'old world' during

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<sup>4</sup> There is no accurate translation for the word 'paves' which is translated either as cobble stone or paving stone - it is a long stone embedded down into the sand so that the top forms a square cobble

During the anti-capitalist demonstrations in Prague 2000, Quebec and Gothenburg 2001 paving stones were pulled up to use as ammunition against riot police





'Under the paving stones, the beach'

This is perhaps the most well-known slogan of May 68.

Acknowledgement: Dark Star undated, frontispiece

May 1968, photographs of the streets after battles between students and police show streets littered with burnt out cars Vienet writes, 'Cars, which concentrated the alienation of work and leisure, mechanical boredom, difficulty of movement and the permanent bad temper of their owners, now attracted only the match.' (1992 p.80)

### **Wall writing and slogans**

The wall writing, consisting of slogans written up on walls in paint or pen, as well as posters, printed or handwritten, formed a key element in the events of May 68. In this section I will explore its significance in expressing and constituting the events, and consider the influence of the Situationists in its themes. Certain themes that intersect with Situationist ideas are identified and explored with examples of slogans.

The slogans written up on walls around Paris are, in anarchist circles, some of the most remembered elements in May 68 (perhaps the most well known being the one referred to above, 'Under the paving stones, the beach'). In this sense, the ethos and principle impulses of May 68 are conserved as a store of remembered phrases. This connects to Vaneigem's notion of sentences 'remembered here or there', having what effect they may, in the formation of radical perspectives (1983 p.7; and see Chapter 4). For example, at a talk, given by one British participant in the events, many of those present pooled, with affection and enjoyment, their own store of memorised slogans (Anarchist Research Group, January 1996). Photographs of the slogans also appear in histories of the Situationists and of May 68 (eg Dark Star undated). The significance of May 68 in anarchism is also affirmed by the publishing, by anarchist imprints, of participants' histories of May 68 (Solidarity 1968; Vienet 1992; Dark Star 2001).

Though some of the wall writing represented a traditional leftist stance (such as 'Free our comrades' or 'General strike on Monday'), many evoke a more radical critique of the existing world and everyday life, focussing on a new language and new subjectivity, on play, poetic and philosophic elements, even while contesting politics, philosophy, aesthetics and poetry (Tchou/Besancon 1968 p.9), and suggest that, indeed, Situationist ideas were in many people's heads and gained new influence through the events and the wall writing. One participant asserted that the ideas and slogans which emerged as the events unfolded appeared to be 'straight out of Situationist texts', almost as though they 'heralded' the events. He particularly remembers the power of one slogan, deriving from Bakunin and already included in the Situationist journal, *IS*, proclaiming 'Ce que nous voulons – tout' ('What do we want everything')

The wall writing began at Nanterre when student protests first broke out, and appearing on walls were slogans derived from Situationist texts: 'Boredom is counter revolutionary', 'Take your desires for reality' and 'Never work'. V enet writes that 'this ushered in a form of agitation that was to enjoy far-reaching success and become one of the original characteristics of the period of occupations...the use of the walls for critical vandalism (was) to have great effect' (1992 pp 22 and 2 )

The wall writing was written anonymously ( Tchou 1968 p.9). It revealed the desire to communicate, expressive of emotional and aesthetic impulses, and to express and create a sense of common experience, a shared sensibility and participation. There were many examples of people who had simply written 'je n'ai rien écrire' ('I have nothing to write'). An introduction to one collection of the wall writing, publ shed the same year, argues that the graffiti became liberty in itself, and that those who wrote that they had nothing to say wrote in order to feel themselves to be with the current of freedom ('Ils ont crié pour "se sentir avec"') (ibid p.8).

The wall writing gave concrete expression to the powerful emotional connections experienced by those involved in the occupations. Koning (1987) writes of the '*verbal* excitement, made real by being given constant expression'. The slogans emerged out of a renewed dialogue and passionate debate, with discussions packing out every lecture theatre of the Sorbonne, on subjects ranging from exams to revolutionary organisation, ideology and mystification, sexual repression to colonialism (Solidarity 1968 p.24). As the events gained momentum, with television mostly silenced, and with many factories closed, people everywhere 'rediscovered the pleasures of social intercourse'; streets and factory yards, not just universities, became 'open forums for popular debate' (Rohan 1988 p.40). Vienet describes the events and strikes as giving people the experience of 'true holidays'; in his words, without work or public transport or cars, 'the strikers recaptured time so sadly lost in factories or on motorways, (or) in front of the TV'; instead people 'strolled, dreamed, learned how to live' (1992 pp.76 and 77)

Participants emphasize the fresh thoughts and new language emerging out of the events (Koning 1987 p 83; Solidarity 1968 p.51).

'Language, rendered stale by decades of bureaucratic mumbo-jumbo...suddenly reappeared as something new and fresh. People reappropriated it in all its fullness. Magnificently apposite and poetic slogans emerged from the anonymous crowd.' (Solidarity ibid)

The wall writing, written up in paint, spray paint and felt pens, was read by hundreds of passers-by as a form of 'improvised wall-newspapers' (Solidarity 1968 p.26), with mixed reactions Posters were designed and printed daily at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and put up all over Paris and in provincial towns Rohan describes the scene of random slogans conveying the prevailing ethos of questioning everything and creating a new subjectivity

'walls everywhere were covered with the psy-turvy wisdom of the times...Let us be realistic and demand the impossible ..Action must not be a reaction but a creation Speak to your neighbours...Open the windows of your heart.. poetry is in the street The dream is

reality .Mind your ears, they have walls...We are reassured, two and two no longer make four .Run comrade, the old world is behind you" (Rohan 1988 p.42)

Participants emphasise the democratic, dialogic form of the wall writing, in which additions and responses to, and crossings out of, existing slogans constituting a dialogue of thoughts and ideas (Tchou/Besancon 1968 p.9). The Solidarity participant articulates the wall writing as both integral to the events and as a democratic form which broke down barriers:

'Mural propaganda is an integral part of the revolutionary Paris of May 1968. It has become a mass activity, part and parcel of the Revolution's method of self-expression. The walls of the Latin Quarter are the depository of a new rationality, no longer confined to books, but democratically displayed at street level and made available to all. The trivial and the profound, the traditional and the esoteric, rub shoulders in this new fraternity, rapidly breaking down the rigid barriers and compartments in people's minds.' (1968 p 8)

This conveys the new appropriation of public space, for the purposes of self-expression and inspirational propaganda, allowing emotional, intellectual and political expression and dialogue.

*'Shake in your shoes, bureaucrats... Humanity will only be happy... '*

Early in the occupations of the Sorbonne, a fresco in the building was made into a comic strip, with one figure in the painting given a cartoon-style bubble reading 'Humanity will only be happy the day the last bureaucrat is hung with the guts of the last capitalist'. This was removed after protests against the defacement of the fresco. The same slogan was sent as a telegram on 17 May to the governments of the USSR and China. The telegrams, addressed to the Kremlin, Moscow, and to the Gate of Celestial Peace, Peking, contained the opening words 'SHAKE IN YOUR SHOES BUREAUCRATS', and continued with the 'Humanity will only be happy...' text referred to above. The slogan has an air of menace and articulates a combination of anger and ridicule towards the holders of power in these state capitalist regimes (possibly containing a statement of differentiation from orthodox Stalinists and Maoists who were also a presence during the occupations, though orthodox leftists - Stalinists, Trotskyists and Maoists - were out of tune with the new libertarian ethos (Solidarity 1968 p.24). Vienet writes that the term 'Stalinist' was 'recognized by everyone as the worst insult in the political spectrum' (1992 p 78), and he emphasises the emerging ethos of spontaneity and libertarianism 'explicitly criticizing hierarchy, commodities, ideology the spectacle' (ibid p 16)

#### *Situationist influence on the slogans*

The Situationists claim that two to three thousand copies of Debord's and Vaneigem's books had already been circulated in the months preceding May 68, and that their perspectives were evident in the events either consciously or unconsciously reproduced in the formation of the events and in the wall writing' as they write, 'Those who doubt this need only *read the walls*' (Knabb ed 1981 p 241)

Some of the slogans show a distinct Situationist style. Appearing on walls was a direct quote from Vaneigem:

'People who talk about revolution and class struggle without referring explicitly to everyday life, without understanding what is subversive about love and what is positive in the refusal of constraints, such people have a corpse in their mouth.' (see Vaneigem 1983 p 15)

This slogan is widely quoted in anarchist texts and even appeared on a T-shirt in the early 1990s produced by an anarchist distribution outfit, BM Active. Other slogans written on walls, which show the influence of Vaneigem include:

'Les réserves imposées au plaisir excite le plaisir de vivre sans réserve' (Tchou 1968 p.66)

(The constraints imposed on pleasure excite the pleasure of living without constraint)

This play on inverting words is commonly used by Vaneigem (see next chapter), and the notion of pleasure and the liberation of restraint is a theme in Situationist writings.

'L'émancipation de l'homme sera totale ou ne sera pas.' (ibid p.67)

(The emancipation of man will be total or will not be) (slogan seen at Censier)

This emphasises the importance of changing the totality, a key Situationist idea.

'Ma pensée n'est pas révolutionnaire si elle n'implique pas des actions quotidiennes dans le cadre éducatif familial et politique, et amoureux' (ibid p.46)

(My thought is not revolutionary if it does not imply everyday actions in the spheres of education, family, politics and love) <sup>6</sup>

Further Situationist influence, including that of Debord and the concept of the spectacle, and the emphasis on participation and real life outside of the spectacle, is detectable in other Situationist-style slogans written on walls, including the following:

'Bannissons les applaudissements, le spectacle est partout'

(Let us ban all applause, the spectacle is everywhere) (Rohan 1988 p 80)

'Ici spectacle de la contestation. Contestons le spectacle.' (Tchou p 34) (slogan seen in the Sorbonne)

(Here, spectacle of contestation. Let's contest the spectacle)

'La vie est ailleurs' (ibid p 179) (wall writing in the Sorbonne)

(Life is elsewhere) (See Gray's use of this in the conclusions of Gray 1974 p 167)

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<sup>6</sup> Though this overlaps with the Situationist stress on totality, it also featured in an anarchist journal *Rouge et Noir* (no 35 1959) according to an article in *Les dossiers de l'histoire* (Mai-Juin 1978 p 12)

**'Regarde ton travail: le neant et la torture y participent'** (slogan in the Sorbonne)

(Look at your work: emptiness and torture accompany it)

This connects with the critique of work made by the Situationists, particularly by Debord who is credited with the famous slogan 'Ne travaillez jamais' (Never work), according to Hussey 2001

Other wall writing with a Situationist flavour includes 'L'imagination prend le pouvoir' (Imagination takes power); 'Down with the spectacle-commodity society'; 'abolish class society'; 'abolish alienation'; 'abolish the university'; 'Long live communication, down with telecommunication' (Solidarity 1968 p.27)

**'Cours, camarade, le vieux monde est derriere toi'**

Run, comrade, the old world is behind you

'Run, comrade, the old world is behind you' is the slogan from which the title of this thesis is derived. The slogan draws on the Situationist use of 'the old world' to refer to the world they rejected.<sup>7</sup>

The phrase 'the old' world' is used in many of the texts, written by Situationists and collaborators such as the Enragés, handed out during the events and documented by Situationist Vienet (1992 eg. pp. 124, 129, 141, 156)

**Situationist themes in the wall writing, from joy to humour, subjectivity to poetry, and the avant garde influence**

I want here to identify, from the spectrum of the wall writing, certain strands that intersect with Situationist ideas, and which continue to form elements in contemporary anarchist and post-Situationist interventions.

**Joy, pleasure, play, spontaneity**

The experience of joy, euphoria and happiness appears to have been widespread according to the testimonies of participants (eg. Hayes see below). Wall writing which captures this include one seen above a makeshift bed in a Sorbonne lecture room which had been transformed into a dormitory (Rohan 1988 p 40). It read: 'Deja 10 jours de bonheur'/'Already 10 days of happiness'.

Another slogan reads 'ICI ON SPONTANE' (Here we are spontaneous) (Tchou 1968 p. 13); and another simply reads 'Je Joue' (I play) (ibid p 36)

Music wafted through the Sorbonne during the occupations. A large piano appeared in the yard of the Sorbonne and remained there for several days, with people playing on it music, from

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<sup>7</sup> As it features in a film made by Guy Debord (1973), it may well have been a slogan originating from Debord

Chopin to jazz to atonal music, which wafted through into lecture theatres where discuss ons were in ferment (Solidarity 1968 p.25) A poem circulated during the events also describes, rather poignantly, the effect of the piano music: 'Everywhere Chopin being played on the pianos/This romantic music...' (Rohan 1988 p.128)

Other slogans express capturing a renewed process of recreation and dreaming

'Recreation permanente' (Tchou p.127) (Permanent recreation)

'Oubliez tout ce que vous avez appris, commencez par rever'

(Forget all you've learned, begin with dreaming' (Rohan 1988 p.66)

'Rêve + evolution = Revolution' (ibid p.96) (a play on words, with 'rever' meaning to dream)

### **Humour**

There are touches of humour in the wall written slogans. One at Nanterre reads 'Je suis marxiste tendance Groucho' (Tchou 1968 p.87) (I am a marxist of the Groucho tendency - as in Groucho Marx of The Marx Brothers, film comedians). Another humorous note comes out of the excitement in one of the early demonstrations: as the students had prepared for a strike in early May, one minister had spoken of the trouble as being caused by a 'groupuscule' - a tiny group; as thousands of students began to gather for a march on 6 May, the students, estimated at over 20,000, began to shout with glee 'We are a groupuscule' (Rohan 1988 p.24).

### **Subjectivity**

Some slogans express the need for changes in subjectivity on a personal level. This concern with therapeutic change as essential in revolutionary transformation was a widespread and significant one in the 1960s counterculture. Prominent theorists of this concern included Herbert Marcuse and R.D.Laing. The need for therapeutic healing is also an element in Situationist writing, particularly in Vaneigem (see also Gray in Chapters 5 and the Conclusions of this thesis)

Examples of the concern with breaking with internalised patterns of authority and for a renewed subjectivity include

'Construire une révolution c'est aussi briser toutes les chaînes intérieures' (Tchou 1968 p.148)

(Building a revolution means also breaking all the inner chains)

This conveys the desire and call for personal change, a freeing from emotional repression and internalised authority

'If faut porter encore en soi un chaos pour pouvoir mettre au monde une étoile dansante'  
(Nietzsche) (ibid p.115)

(You must still carry in yourself a chaos in order to be able to bring to the world a dancing star  
(Nietzsche))

This rather poignant quote, apparently taken from Nietzsche, and written up in the entrance hall of the Odeon, illustrates the Situationist love of poetic evocations of releasing imagination, it suggests the rejection of absolutism and a sense of embracing confusion to release poetry, joy and subjectivity.

'Ouvrez les fenêtres de votre coeur' (ibid p.82) (slogan seen at Censier)  
(Open the windows of your heart)

This is unlikely to be Situationist-derived, for it has a commonplace form of verbal expression. It suggests the desire for emotional release and the expression of love.

'L'anarchie c'est je' (ibid p.15) (Anarchy it is I) (wall writing at Nanterre)

Here anarchy is expressed as the individual subject – illustrating the desire to combine personal and political liberation which was strong during the 1960s counterculture.

'Qu'est-ce qu'un maître, un dieu? L'un et l'autre sont une image du père et remplissent une fonction oppressive par définition' (ibid p.149)

(What is a master, a god? They are both images of the father, and by definition fulfil a repressive function)

This slogan, appearing in the faculty of medicine, is an anarchistic identification of authority figures in religious and family contexts

'L'homme n'est ni le bon sauvage de Rousseau, ni le pervers de l'église et de la Rochefoucauld. Il est violent quand on l'opprime, il est doux quand il est libre'

(Man is neither Rousseau's gentle savage, nor the pervert of the Church and La Rochefoucauld. He is violent when he is oppressed and gentle when he is free.' (Rohan 1988 p.90)

This identifies the sources of perversion, corruption and violence, with a notion of human nature as gentle when freed from oppression

## **Poetry**

Some slogans appear to be the original poetic contribution of the writer - for example in 'The wind is blowing, we must try to live' (Rohan 1988 p 94). Others capture poetry in the wider sense as a lived experience.

'La poésie est dans la rue' (Tchou p 173) (slogan in rue Rotrou, near the Odeon)



(Poetry is in the street)

"La Revolte et la Revolt seule est creatrice de la lumiere, et cette lumiere ne peut emprunter que trois voies: la poésie, le liberté et l'amour." Andre Breton'

(Revolt and Revolt alone is the creator of light, and this light can only take three forms poetry, freedom and love." Andre Breton)

(Rohan 198 p 92)

This slogan, seen in the Law faculty, is a quote from Surrealist Andre Bre on. It illustrates the powerful influence of early 'avant garde' traditions.

Poems were widely circulated during May and June in Paris 1968 (ibid p.122). Quotes from two examples are:

'I keep thinking/That the place of a poet at the moment/Is in the street...' (ibid p.124)

'A thousand deaths are waiting for us at every street corner/They are called/Money/Nuclear Power/Politics/Exploitation/Slavery/Injustice/Their symbol is the truncheon/The power that makes us die./Our barricades are a shout of protest...' (ibid p.126)

### **Avant garde influence**

A Surrealist influence is evident in the quote above from Breton. Other examples are:

'A Bas le réalisme socialiste. Vive le surrealisme' (Tchou p.128) (Slogan at Condorcet)  
(Down with socialist realism. Long live surrealism)

'La vie c'est une antilope mauve sur un champ de thons. Tzara.' (ibid p.154)

(Life s a mauve antelope on a field of tuna. Tzara)

Written up in the Sorbonne, this quote from the dadaist Tzara illustrates the links between the traditions of politicized art movements from dada to the Situationists via surrealism and the Lettrists. This is also clear in another slogan appearing in the foyer of the Odeon, 'Tout est dada' (ibid p 109) (Everything is dada)

### **Critiques of art**

The surrealist Benjamin Peret is quoted to express 'Art does not exist Art is You ' (Rohan 1988 p 72) Other examples of critique of art include

'L'art est mort, liberons notre vie quotidienne' (Tchou p 174) (seen in the Sorbonne)  
(Art is dead. free our everyday life)

'L'art c'est de la merde' (ibid p.113)

(Art is shit)

### **A critique of the totality and the eruption of May 68**

The critique of the totality of conditions - from wage labour to class society to the 'spectacle' - existed alongside several tendencies amongst those involved in the occupation, ranging from reformist to socialist. The more radical ideas appeared to spread even as the events unfolded (S Hayes, participant, personal communication). This is supported by other accounts, which discuss how people changed through their participation in the events. Rohan writes that 'People changed more in a few hours, a few days, than they had in many years.' (Rohan 1988 p.42) The Solidarity participant writes of more and more people, drawn daily into the maelstrom of events, taking up revolutionary ideas,

'learning within days what it had taken others a lifetime to learn'. In changing their environment people themselves were changed.' (ibid pp 25 and 24)

Though neither participant alludes to whether this change was permanent or only for the duration of the events. I would suspect the latter, though see later in this chapter for the account of one British participant, S. Hayes, on the longterm effects of experiencing such euphoria and absorbing a critique of the totality and of bourgeois conventionalism.

The Situationist Vienet analyses the rapid change and communication of more radical ideas as emerging through the experience of opposition and of a lived alternative reality. As people reclaimed time and public space and rediscovered everyday life, they began to declare that they could no longer live as before (1992 pp.76-77). In Vienet's analysis,

'Radical theory, reputed to be so difficult by the intellectuals who were unable to live it, became tangible for all those who felt it in their slightest gestures of refusal, which is why they had no trouble exposing on the walls the theoretical formulations of what they desired to live. One night on the barricades was all that the *blousons noirs* needed to become politicized and reach perfect agreement with the most advanced faction of the occupation movement.' (ibid p.77)<sup>8</sup>

For Vienet, it was the taste of 'lived freedom' of the events, and the widespread stopping of work, that allowed people to become aware of their alienation and what they wanted to change - in Vienet's words, 'to measure the amount of creative energy that had been crushed .the days condemned to production, shopping, television, and to passivity' (p 80). This allowed the free flow of creative activity in every sphere - graffiti, language, agitation, songs and posters, comic strips (ibid).

Participants write of the changes in the way people communicated and related to each other, a 'tremendous surge of community and cohesion', with people who were usually shy losing their

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<sup>8</sup> As a Situationist, Vienet is clearly referring to the most advanced faction as being that of the Situationists and similarly radical sections

self-consciousness and becoming communicative or outspoken (Solidarity 1968 p 24, Rohan 1988 p 42) Division between intellectuals and workers were broken down (Vienet 1992 pp 76-77).

### **The End of the Events and the aftermath**

During June, through police and state repression, striking workers began to return to work, and the movement began to be defeated. There were violent confrontations at Renault and Peugeot car factories, and in the latter, police shot into the crowd and killed two workers. There was last night of rioting on 12 June, and shortly after the police entered the Sorbonne to remove the remaining occupants.

Despite heavy state clampdown in France following the events, optimism amongst radicals and leftists for 'revolution' remained high (personal communication S.Hayes October 1999). Vienet for example concludes his book, written in 1968, with the words:

'Now a fire has been lit which will never go out. The occupation movement has ended the sleep of the masters of commodities, and never again shall spectacular society sleep in peace.' (1992 p 122)

By 1970, imminent 'revolution' seemed less likely. By 1972, the official Debord-centred Situationist International, by this time consisting of only two members, Debord and Sanguinetti, dissolved itself. Some of those involved in the May 68 occupations left the city to form rural communes (see below). Some found it difficult to return to conventional life and the treadmill of exams, mortgages, marriage and 'bourgeois lifestyle' (S. Hayes unpublished communication 1997 p.30).

### **An encounter with the Situationists, May 68 and the aftermath**

In 1996, one British participant, Sebastian Hayes<sup>9</sup>, in the events of May 68, was invited to give a talk for the Anarchist Research Group (by its convenor, David Goodway, who had been a fellow student at Oxford University with Hayes and had subsequently become acquainted with him in London at anarchist meetings. Hayes had shared a flat with Christopher Gray, who became an English member of the Situationist International (see Chapter 6). Hayes had been in Paris, accompanying his girlfriend who was a student at the Sorbonne, at the time of the occupations. His account of the events, the Situationists he encountered and the aftermath of 68 forms a testimony of an individual's personal experience, which I want to document briefly as it forms a more critical evaluation and provides insight into the impact of the Situationist critique on one person's life.

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix on methodology for an account of Hayes' communications to me, in person and in written accounts, some of them unpublished.

Hayes had not planned to stay long in Paris when the occupations began, but found himself despite his mixed feelings of elation and fear about the events unfolding, drawn by a 'formidable pull' to stay in Paris

'... it was like a whirlpool. I was already part of this new monster, the "movement" whatever it was, my personal identity had got mixed up with thousands of others' (1997 unpublished account p. 18)

He conveyed the sensation of being swept along by a tide of events, this 'new monster' expressing the sense of movement as bigger than those involved, who were carried along by a feeling of identification with the radical fervour. In Hayes' analysis, the essential emotional link was between hundreds or thousands of others, not to a single person, an almost mystic sense of being part of a larger diffuse human entity (ibid pp. 24-5).

Hayes himself did not participate in the street fighting or barricading, avoiding such actions out of fear. He was aware that Debord took part in this with some audacity and careful strategy. Hayes had a few encounters with Situationists such as Debord and Vienet, including one at a meeting in a ramshackle apartment in Paris, which he describes as having a conspiratorial air, the room lit by candles and the air thick with cigarette smoke. During the meeting, a young man announced that he had met a parachutist who was ready to supply arms to the movement. Debord refused the offer, stating that actions should be political rather than criminal. Hayes gave a description of one person in attendance at the meeting; he particularly objected to a piece of jewellery one man was wearing: the jewellery had the man's face engraved on it, with the slogan 'La liberte, le crime qui contient tous les crimes' ('Liberty, the crime which contains all crimes') (Hayes, personal communication 1997).<sup>10</sup>

Hayes' personal response to the Situationists and their 'camp followers' that he met was that he found them

'tiresome people, arrogant, quarrelsome and even malicious. This includes the great Debord himself who was an incredibly cantankerous person' (Hayes unpublished written communication November 1999)

He nonetheless saw Debord as a man of integrity, who never 'sold out' in terms of his career (that is, Debord did not use his radical credentials and writing skills for commercial gain, and had refused a prestigious literary prize even before 1968)

Hayes found unnerving the tendency amongst some followers of the Situationists to incite acts of agitation amongst others without sufficient regard for their personal safety. This was an element at work more generally during the events for example, during one crowded gathering

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An illustration in Vienet 1992, pp 33 shows a portrait engraved by the Enrage René Riesel with the same slogan, 'La liberte le crime qui contient tous les crimes' This suggests that the man with the jewellery was René Riesel himself I was interested to note that René Riesel is still engaged in oppositional protest in 1999 He was one of three members of the Confederation Paysanne arrested for taking part in the destruction of genetically modified rice in Montpellier The Confederation Paysanne is the organization of which José Bové a key figure in the anti-globalisation movement, is a leading figure *Do or Die* 8, 1999, pp 1-3

at the Theatre de l'Odeon, someone announced that the platform might give way because of the weight of people on it; others shouted that they should let it happen, in a euphoric disregard for their own safety and that of others.

Hayes's account of the impact of the events of May 68 and of Situationist ideas is full of contradiction and ambivalence. On the one hand, he wept for joy on the first night of the barricades and experienced the events as 'taste of paradise' in which people were 'sincere, gay, serious, heroic and poetic':

'It was the only period in my life where I even saw large numbers of people sabotaging their own careers, status, money etc because it was seen as wrong to join the system (not inconvenient but morally wrong). Maybe the ecstatic element was more tied up with this moral aspect than people think: the idea is even novel to me' (ibid)

In Hayes' view, the events had a catastrophic effect on the lives of some participants. Some found it difficult to return to work, school or university, some drifted into petty crime, drug-taking or mysticism as a search for enlightenment (unpublished account 1997 p.30). The conventional 'bourgeois' lifestyle dismissed with such profound contempt in 1968 seemed impossible to return to (ibid). In Hayes' estimation, those who really lived the transformation of May 68, never recovered from its euphoric effects. paradise, once tasted but not sustained, had a devastating effect: he likens this to a narrative by a French writer, a story of someone who has spent years in an enchanted castle, once released, finds he hates it and would like to burn it to the ground (unpublished November 1999).

In 1970 Hayes joined the rural communes in the south of France which had formed in the aftermath of May 68, and to which a few followers of the Situationists and the Enrages also moved. Nearly all of the communes collapsed because of a combination of factors: lack of skills in rural living and working the land; hostility from local population and police; and the lack of structure allowed by the philosophy of anti-authoritarianism, which left the communes open to being taken over by cliques or by those with stronger personalities, and also attracted what Hayes terms 'desperadoes', petty gangsters and drunkards. Hayes' own experience of the rural communes was fairly bleak and he describes them as 'psychologically intolerable' - 'like a jail with no jailers or a lunatic asylum with no nurses'. (personal communication June 1998).

Though Hayes finds the Situationist critique 'more relevant than ever' in contemporary life, he sees his career as having been 'ruined' by the critique of bourgeois lifestyle and of careerism that he, amongst others, absorbed from radical perspectives such as those of the Situationists, and the experience of May 68. He has, since returning to Britain, made a living by translating and writing, and more recently by garden design and gardening. He lives in London, and attempts to put into practice his own notion of convivial living, rejecting consumerism, aiming to buy food in small shops rather than supermarkets. He does not own a television or car, and uses his bicycle to transport tools to gardening projects.

Hayes' account forms a unique personal insight into an experience of May 68 and its aftermath, an encounter with Situationists and their ideas, and the effect he deems these to have had on his own personal life and career.

### Violence and danger

Though pacifism had its adherents in the anti-Vietnam and hippy counterculture of the 1960s, and during the anti-nuclear struggles which gained prominence in the 1970s and early 1980s, few people took up a pacifist position in France in 1968, according to Hayes (unpublished 1997 p.19). There was a simple polarisation of the enemy the police, particularly the riot police, the CRS, versus the heroic unarmed students (ibid)

Many participants in May 68 appear to have become attracted to danger, and to the excitement of violent confrontation. The confrontations were certainly instigated initially by police drawing truncheons and rifle butts on students without provocation during a demonstration on 6 May 1968 (Rohan 1988 p.26). Rohan however conveys how many subsequently discovered an attraction to danger.

'.. in the twirling mist of lingering tear gas, many discovered for the first time the perverse attractions of danger and violence as they moved ahead of the crowd, alone and exposed to get as near to the black line of *gendarmes* as their newly-found courage would allow them to, a paving stone in hand, anger and fear pleasurably fighting it out in their stomach.' (ibid)

Rohan discusses how violence was later repudiated by many who became 'pacifists of the last resort' (ibid p.140) (and see below)

A few of the slogans written on walls adopt a rhetoric of supporting armed struggle: one reads 'kiss your love without letting go of your rifle' (Tchou 1968 p.110).<sup>11</sup> This is rhetorical, since no participants possessed or carried arms (with the possible exception of the notorious 'Kantangais', mercenaries who took up a room in the basement of the Sorbonne).<sup>12</sup>

Hayes also noted the tendency, of some of those attracted to the barricades, towards 'vainglorious, boastful behaviour', and cites an example of the 'handsome desperado' at a meeting of Situationists and followers, who spoke of knowing someone who could offer arms to the movement (see above). Hayes recalls that this 'desperado' boasted about the number of cars he had burned during the night of the barricades (Hayes unpublished 1997 p.15)

Guy Debord himself participated in the street fighting, avoiding front line confrontations and using side alleys (Hayes unpubl shed 1999). Debord, in his semi-autobiographical book *Panegyric*, makes several references to his self-avowed attraction to danger. He rejected the conventions of education and career that could exploit his artistic and literary skills, and tended consciously to seek out milieux which he regarded as dangerous. As an adolescent he sought a

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<sup>1</sup> There were also slogans critical of arms one read 'The weapons of the critique shoot down weapons themselves' (Tchou 1968 p.115)

life of adventure, with his eyes open (1991 p.13), and he spent his youth in a milieu of artists and poets 'capable of living in violence (ibid p.25), of which many were 'rebels, destined for bad ends' (ibid p.16). Among the nihilists and street life he encountered in his youth, unpredictable people and occasionally rather dangerous, was one man who robbed banks and gloried in not robbing the poor, and another 'who never killed anyone when he was not angry' (ibid p.24). Debord seems keen to emphasize the extent of his contact mainly with 'rebels and the poor', those who had been in prison, and the proportion of his associates who met early deaths by suicide or by being shot (ibid p.16). Of the periods when he lived in Italy and Spain, Debord writes that

'I did not try too hard to avoid some dangerous encounters: and it is even possible that I cold-bloodedly sought them out.' (ibid p.47)

He describes his attraction to war, and his study of its logic as a strategy similar to a board game (ibid p.63), and co-wrote, with his partner Alice Becker-Ho, a book on the game of war (*Le Jeu de la Guerre* 1987), and claims to have drawn on the game in his own life strategy:

'...I have played this game, and, in the often difficult conduct of my life, I have utilized lessons from it - I have also set myself rules of the game for this life and I have followed them' (1991 p.64).

In foregrounding these elements, rather than omitting or minimizing them, Debord appears to present with pride this association with 'low life' rebels, criminals, the game of war. He reveals an attraction to danger and dangerous individuals. The violent and tragic circumstances of some of those he met are presented not so much as an indictment of the world he opposes (though this may be implicit) but rather as an important aspect of his life history and identity. While it might be an exaggeration to say that he glamorizes and glorifies the connections to danger, violence and crime which have touched his life, he presents these without regret, and, rather, with pride.

After 1968, violence was rejected by many after the discovery of atrocities committed in the name of leftist revolution. Rohan for example describes how some participants, after an initial attraction to violence and danger, underwent a change of attitude and a shift to pacifism. In a poem he writes:

'Violence was too often amongst us  
(with and against us)  
until much later  
in a collective change of heart  
we repudiated it  
when collective murders  
in faraway places  
(but in the name of some of our dreams)

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When asked about the Katangais during one talk, Haes responded that he felt reassurance from their presence and hoped that they would help protect students in the event of the Sorbonne being stormed

became too much to bear.

Which is how we ended up

pacifists of the last resort.' (Rohan 1988 p 140)

A connection can be made in this respect to current debates in radical environmental, anarchist and anti-capitalist activist currents. While those of 'class struggle' perspectives openly adopt confrontational 'spiky' tactics at demonstrations, there is continuous debate about the tactics of property damage (for violence against people or living things is opposed) and whether it is acceptable or not. Some see property damage as a legitimate critical attack on symbols of capitalism and a means of gaining attention for their perspectives which are otherwise ignored. Others see this as alienating people who would otherwise be sympathetic

## Conclusions

This account of the Situationists contextualises their project historically and in terms of their presence in May 68, their 'heyday' in which they were, as Hayes puts it, 'the people of the hour'.

Situationist texts<sup>13</sup> have been, since the late 1960s, translated, published and kept in print by anarchist presses, attesting to the interest in their ideas and their continuing influence in anarchist currents. Another interrelated area is the events of May 68 themselves, accounts of which are also published by anarchist presses (eg. Dark Star undated; Solidarity 1968; Vienet 1992). May 68 is seen, by some anarchists, as a romantic inspirational moment which offered the experience of freedom (Carol at Hayes' talk, London Anarchist Forum May 1998).

These examples of writing and publishing Situationist texts and accounts of May 68 also affirm the importance of the past, as a repository of ideas, a source of learning and inspiration, drawn on to inform subsequent generations, and the importance of texts in transmitting ideas. The significance of writing as a means of expressing oppositional ideas is also conveyed by the significance of the wall writing. Archived in print and in memory by subsequently generations of anarchists, the wall writing continues to allow the ethos and impulse of May 68 to create further ripples over time

The wall writing, written in paint and pen on walls all around Paris in May 68, is analysed for certain themes which exhibit a Situationist influence. from the ethos of libertarianism to the rejection of hierarchy and to the Situationist emphasis on play, subjectivity, humour and spontaneity. These are elements which continue to inform contemporary anarchist and anti-capitalist currents.

The wall writing also forms another important element, both in the historification of May 68 and as a store of remembered slogans that are used at times in the conversations and writing of anarchists. Such slogans appear to act as powerful expressions, eliciting admiration for their concise capturing of an attitude or a critique. Hayes cites Debord's skill as a propagandist and



writer of slogans, and this suggests that Debord helped inject a certain flair into the writing of slogans in the events of May 68, a flair which sporadically re-erupts in more contemporary interventions and demonstrations

Slogans in print form a significant element in the interventions of Turner (Chapter 7) and Home and Vague (Chapter 9). Examples of slogans, as chants or written up on walls, at times reappear in the visible manifestations of anti-capitalism: for example the slogan 'CAPITALISM, NO THANKS, WE'LL BURN YOUR FUCKING BANKS', a popular chant during the Seattle protests, 1999, was attributed to anarchists, and was printed on a free flyer included in the US periodical *Anarchy*, in 2000. This slogan is perhaps closer in style to those of Class War (see Chapter 1) than those of the Situationists but nonetheless appears to reflect the tradition of slogans that the Situationists and May 68, and the countercultural and punk movements, injected further into the anarchist movement. Another powerful slogan was seen written on a wall in Genoa port in July 2001, in the demonstrations against the G8 (leaders of the eight most industrialised nations): 'YOU MAKE PLANS, WE MAKE HISTORY'. This encapsulates a distinction between the purveyors of globalisation and its opponents, and the way in which the slogan addresses the holders of power brings to mind the message, written, with an extra touch of menace, by the Situationists and sent to the states of both USSR and China, that read 'Shake in your shoes, bureaucrat...' The notion of making one's own history, alluding to Marx's phrase about men making their own history but not in conditions of their own choosing, is also alluded to in Situationist texts.<sup>14</sup>

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Situationist texts published by anarchist imprints include Debord 1987 1979, Debord and Sanguinetti 1990 Knabb ed 1981 Venet 1992

<sup>14</sup> As when Debord writes, 'People are as deprived as possible of communication and self-realization. Deprived of the opportunity to personally make their own history' (Debord Perspectives for Conscious Alterations in Everyday Life p. 2 in Knabb ed 1981)

## Chapter 4

### **'Poetry without poems': Situationist texts as a lyrical legacy**

'Rediscovering poetry may become indistinguishable from reinventing revolution...In non-revolutionary periods circles of poetic adventure could be considered the only places where revolution survives in its totality.. the shadow of an absent character. So that what we mean by poetic adventure is difficult, dangerous and always uncertain of success . today the SI is only interested in poetry without poems.' (All the King's Men' *Internationale Situationiste* no 8 1963 in Gray 1974 p.77; Knabb ed 1981 p.115)

'let sentences remembered here or there have what effect they may' (Vaneigem 1983 p.7)

In this chapter, my aim is to consider Vaneigem and Debord's key texts on their own terms, as rhetoric (rather than purely as theory), intended to communicate radical perspectives to a sympathetic readership. My approach is to convey the content of key Situationist ideas, and also the form, analysing how text, including poetic evocation, is used to evoke an oppositional response in the reader.

It is the content of Situationist ideas – their critique of the totality, of everyday life and hierarchical power – that is the primary source of their continuing appeal. With the colonisation of every sphere of life with commodities, their critiques are more relevant than ever. The chapter begins by introducing these ideas and their continuing relevance.

I then explore two key texts – by Vaneigem and Debord – for the content of their ideas and for their poetic lyricism. My argument is that poetic evocation of an oppositional impulse may be another source – in addition to the content - of the continuing appeal of Situationist ideas in contemporary anarchistic currents

In this sense my approach is historicist, in contrast to, for example, the approach of Plant (1992) in analysing Situationist theory in the light of postmodern and poststructuralist discourse. My task here is to explicate the meanings and literary methods of the key texts discussed here. I have therefore chosen not to detract from this by counterposing the Situationist call to authentic participatory life and their critique of consumption with the currently more fashionable postmodern critique of authenticity and other pro-consumption perspectives (Miller 1994,1998).

#### **Key Situationist texts as an introduction**

Frequently in this thesis I have used the term the 'world' or the 'existing world' to conceive of the totality which is opposed and of which a transformation is desired. This terminology derives

directly from the Situationists, and evokes the necessity of total transformation: not merely the abolition of capitalism, the state and hierarchical power, but a transformation of everyday life and subjectivity, the emotional and psychological dimensions as well as the social, political, economic and cultural spheres. This notion of the totality is further developed by Barrot, as shown in the next chapter, in his emphasis on *being* different.

This is a key element in Situationist ideas – the contestation of the totality of relations that are played out as aspects of hierarchical and alienated life, and the desire to transform them. The subtitle of the pamphlet *On the poverty of student life*, which created such a stir in Strasbourg, 1966 (see Chapter 3), is indicative of the Situationist emphasis on the totality of manifestations to be transcended: the full title is *On the poverty of student life considered in its economic, political, psychological, sexual, and particularly intellectual aspects, and a modest proposal for its remedy*. The pamphlet introduces the focus on the totality with a critique of the specialisms of academic disciplines, which create false categories and obscure the totality, and introduces the concepts denoting the key manifestations of modern capitalism's impact on everyday life – the commodity and the spectacle:

'Up to now, studies of student life have ignored the essential issue. The surveys and analyses have all been psychological or sociological or economic: in other words, academic exercises, content with the false categories of one specialist or another. None of them can achieve what is most needed – a view of modern society as a whole. Everything is said about our society except what it is, and the nature of its two basic principles – the commodity and the spectacle. The fetishism of facts masks the essential category, and the details consign the totality to oblivion.'

(1985 pp.5-6)

The same pamphlet also highlights the role of modern industrial capitalism, everyday life and the consumption of commodities, and the emphasis on transforming the totality and everyday life in order to allow the fulfilment of human desires and the richness of lived experience. Again I will quote at length to allow the flavour of the writing, and the context in which the concepts are used, to emerge

'Already, in the highly industrialised countries, the decomposition of modern society is becoming obvious at a mass level. All previous ideological explanations of the world have collapsed, and left the misery and chaos of everyday life...Politics, morality and culture are all in ruins – and have now reached the point of being marketed as such, as their own parody, the spectacle of decadence being the last desperate attempt to stabilise the decadence of the spectacle. Less and less masks the reduction of the whole of life to the production and consumption of commodities, less and less masks the relationship between the isolation, emptiness and anguish of everyday life and this dictatorship of the commodity; less and less masks the increasing waste of the forces of production and the richness of lived experience now possible if these forces were only used to fulfil human desires instead of to repress them' (1985 p.31)

The Situationists took Marx's ideas on commodity fetishism and Lukacs' notion of reification<sup>1</sup> and developed them to a critique of the totality, of the spectacle, and everyday life. The shorthand for the totality of relations that create alienation and repression, in all its political, cultural, social, economic and psychological forms, becomes, simply, 'the world', or 'the existing world'.

Commodities, which play their role in consumer/lifestyle culture, have colonised every sphere of life yet more deeply now, over thirty years after the Situationists were writing. To give a few examples of the contemporary permeation of consumer/commodity culture: the car has largely eclipsed the act of walking and strolling; the gym exists as another house of commodities, its apparatus ready to be worked to make up for the missing exercise; ready made meals, central heating, washing machines, hoovers, replace the need for other movements and convivial acts from cooking to chopping wood to washing clothes to cleaning. The mass of commodities, once discarded (consumed), overflows into landfill; mountains of fridges await shipment to another land. The built-in obsolescence of commodities encourages their replacement – records by CDs, videos by DVDs, analog by digital, all, along with the spectacles of sport, celebrities, Disney land and theme parks, eroding participatory cultural forms such as dance, song and play. Shopping malls and supermarkets squeeze out the small local shops where customers could, at the least, enjoy more social interaction. As the variety of everyday life becomes more and more homogenised and imprinted with the corporations' colonisation of the market (shopping at Tesco, coffee at Starbucks, a burger at McDonalds, a video from Blockbuster, a drink in O'Neills pseudo-Irish pub, a film at Warner Village cinema complex), tourism, sold as an escape, becomes a non-luxury for the populations of industrialised countries; with their governments and corporations successfully plundering environments the world over, the 'natural' world is sold back to people as tourists, travelling in planes whose trails contain more pollution and greenhouse gases to add to those pumped out by motorised transport and industry.

The ideas of the Situationists, then, may not be in everyone's heads – but they have more relevance than ever.

### **Vaneigem, Debord and the evocation, through poetic lyricism, of an oppositional impulse**

Situationist ideas, which have gained influence on subsequent generations of radicals in anarchist milieux, are explored in this chapter via their two most well-known books. Rick Turner (see Chapter 7) describes *The Society of the Spectacle*, one of the texts discussed here, as one of the most influential books he has read

Two key Situationist books, both originally published in 1967, were written with the purpose of providing a theoretical critique of existing conditions and of provoking and heightening the experience and sensation of this critique and the taste of an alternative reality Guy Debord's

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<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of these concepts see, for example Bottomore et al ed 1983 pp 411-2

*Society of the Spectacle* was to be a book of theory to be present in the period of unrest and subversion that the Situationists anticipated when it was published in 1967 (though during May 68 even the Situationists were surprised at the timing and rapid eruption of events, see previous chapter). The book was to provide a 'theoretical condemnation of the order of things' that would heighten and make more 'bitter' the discontent that would shake an established society (1979 p 9). Raoul Vaneigem's *Revolution of Everyday Life*, originally published in 1967, refers to the 'real experience' of his book which is to be comprehensible to readers with a real interest in living it <sup>2</sup>

This chapter excavates these two texts, which are the most influential and widely read Situationist texts in anarchistic currents, and analyses the source of their continuing appeal as lying in a lyrical and poetic evocation of the experience of critique and of what Vaneigem terms 'transcendence' - the taste of an alternative. This relates to my notion, introduced in Chapter 1, that oppositional currents arise primarily through the impulse and experience of reaction against the world (and this notion of an impulse is explored further in Chapter 5). Situationist rhetoric, as analysed here, appeals directly to the reader's own experience of the world to allow the discovery of another more subversive and oppositional perspective on that reality, and a desire to change it.

The libertarian Marxist, Henri Lefebvre, was an early influence on the development of Situationist ideas. An extract from Lefebvre's *La Somme et Le Reste*, printed in *Internationale Situationiste* 4, develops Lefebvre's notion of 'moments', in which emotions from horror to joy are conceived of as revealing to the individual the possibility of transforming everyday life (Hussey 2001 p 138). Both Vaneigem and Debord appear to seek to arouse an emotional response – from a disgust with everyday life, to a transcendent joyful desire for an alternative. This suggests that Lefebvre's conceptualisation of 'moments' may have been influential in the development of Vaneigem and Debord's evocative rhetoric and their apparent appeal to an emotional response in the reader.

This supports also my notion of oppositional currents as informed and guided by an oppositional *impulse*, *sensibility* and *ethos* of reaction against the existing world combined with the desire to transform it. This tends to be sidelined in the new social movement studies discussed in Chapter 1. Such an *impulse* is located not merely cognitively and intellectually but at an *emotional* level. Examples of writing which also draw on this emotional level of expression and reader's response are those of Rick Turner (Chapter 7) and *Fifth Estate* (Chapter 11)

Debord's text combines a contemplative lyricism with an urgently prophetic tone, seeking to awaken in the reader a critical perspective by means of a comprehension of the historical conditions in which s/he lives. Even where the meaning is obscure (for example "The social

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this is a paraphrase of Vaneigem's statement 'My aim is not to make the real experience of this book comprehensible to readers who have no real interest in reliving it' (1983 p 7)

practice which the autonomous spectacle confronts is the real totality which contains the spectacle' (7)) the style of writing of the whole, has the same quality as a 'mantra', and the lyrical oracular style carries the reader through such abstractions to the experience of a critical conception of the existing world. Plays on words (for example 'The spectacle does not realize philosophy, it philosophizes reality' (19)) contribute to the effect of rhetoric washing over the abstraction to allow the reader to taste and experience Debord's critical relationship to the world.

The Situationists' use of poetic language, the language of lived experience, which is seen as merging with, both expressing and constituting, radical theory, is alluded to as a conscious method. Vaneigem makes explicit his method when he writes that

'people still try to use words and signs to perfect their aborted gestures. It is because they do that a poetic language exists: a language of lived experience which, for me, merges with radical theory, the theory which penetrates the masses and becomes a material force.' (1983 p 75)

In the following two sections I explore themes in Vaneigem's and Debord's texts.

### **Vaneigem's Revolution of Everyday Life**

Vaneigem's use of poetic metaphor is evident throughout his text, as in his image of the person 'ground up in the machinery of hierarchical power, caught in a net of interferences, a chaos of oppressive techniques whose ordering only awaits patient programming by programmed experts' (1983 p.8)

He continually counterposes the negative force of oppression with the positive force of freedom.

'Not a moment passes without each one of us experiencing, on every level of reality, the contradiction between oppression and freedom, without each one of us being caught up and weirdly twisted by two antagonistic perspectives simultaneously: the perspective of power and the perspective of transcendence' (ibid)

### **Subjectivity**

He counterposes also 'subjectivity' and everything that corrupts it' (ibid), and sees the subject as able to recognise the potential for self-realization and to perceive the dissimulations in ideologies, as he writes,

'The revolution of daily life will be the work of those who...are able to recognize the seeds of total self-realization and to perceive the dissimulations in ideologies and who cease consequently to be either mystified or mystifiers.' (p 127)

Vaneigem sees radical resistance as springing initially from subjectivity. He acknowledges that he has 'given subjective will an easy time in this book' (p 7), and defends this in evoking the

extent to which contemporary oppressions experienced subjectively provoke radical perspectives

Drawing on a metaphor of a naked creature always ready to confront us with the difficulties we have in adapting to the contemporary world, which is exposed more sharply when stripped of religious beliefs and the crust of words and concepts of art and philosophy which had 'concealed man from himself' (pp. 12-13), he writes:

'the living reality of non-adaptation to the world is always crouched ready to spring. Since neither gods nor words can manage to cover it up decently any longer, this commonplace creature roams naked in railway stations and vacant lots; it confronts you at each self evasion, it grasps your shoulder, catches your eye - and the dialogue begins.' (p. 13)

Radical theory is seen as emerging from subjectivity and creativity

'Radical theory comes out of the individual, out of being as subject: it penetrates the masses through what is most creative in each person, through subjectivity, through the desire for realization.' (p. 74)

In Vaneigem's notion of subjectivity as a source of oppositional response to the world, he sees radical refusal as coming into being through

'a chain reaction leaping from one subjectivity to the next'

'...the fragmentariness of resistance and refusal turns, ironically, into its opposite, for it recreates the preconditions for a global refusal' (p. 126)

### Critique of consumerism

In his emphasis on changing the totality, Vaneigem summons the daily experience of consumer capitalism and the long history of repression through civilization. Drawing on Marx's critique of commodity fetishism, he counterposes authentic life with its impoverishment by things which have to be consumed. Through the consumption of more and more goods we change illusions at an accelerating pace, yet we are unchanged, amongst the monotony of changing goods and images. The descriptive rhetoric aims to evoke subjectively in the reader the sense of emptiness and despair in the experience of modern life. Vaneigem addresses the reader

'And here you are bewildered and lost in a new prosaicism' (pp. 14-15)

This is a call to the subjective experience from which, as Vaneigem conceives, radical perspectives arise. An awareness of modern life, once exposed, experienced and acknowledged, is the source of an awakening of a critique and a desire for transformation. I will quote at length to allow the flavour of the writing and the poetic use of metaphors to emerge (for example, the images of ourselves as frozen in the empty spaces behind the waterfall of gadgets, and of the kaleidoscope of voyeurism):

'the wealth of consumer goods impoverishes authentic life. It does so in two ways. First, it replaces authentic life with *things*. Secondly, it makes it impossible to become attached to

these things, precisely because they have to be *consumed*, ie destroyed. Whence an absence of life which is ever more frustrating, a self-devouring dissatisfaction.' (p 122)

'the economy cannot stop making us consume more and more, and to consume without respite is to change illusions at an accelerating pace which gradually dissolves the illusion of change. We find ourselves alone, unchanged, frozen in the empty spaces behind the waterfall of gadgets, family cars and paperback books ' (p 14)

'The affluent society is a society of voyeurs. To each his own kaleidoscope a tiny movement of the fingers and the picture changes You can't lose. two fridges, a VW, TV, promotion, time to kill...But then the monotony of the images we consume gets the upper hand...' (p.14)

### **Critique of hierarchy, history of power and civilization**

Vaneigem's critique of consumerism is embedded in a critique of hierarchical power relations. This is captured in one epigram: 'Purchasing power is a licence to purchase power' (p.51)

He traces the growing incorporation of working class people into the system of consumerism, the pursuit of goods, and pursuit of power, back through the network of historical developments through aristocratic power to the power of money, which was to become the new 'god of the bourgeois' (p 51):

'only the ability to consume faster - cars, alcohol, houses, TVs and playmates - shows how far you've got up the hierarchical ladder. From blue blood to the power of money, from the superiority of money to the power of the gadget, the nec plus ultra of Christian/socialist civilization: a civilization of prosaism and vulgar detail. The perfect nest for Nietzsche's "little men"' (ibid)

'the new proletariat, now paid beyond the level of subsistence, is persuaded to buy himself objects to distinguish himself in the social hierarchy.' (ibid)

### **Everyday Life**

Vaneigem invokes examples of mundane experience, connecting to the reader's everyday lives to evoke an emotional response at an experiential level. The use of metaphor and allegory imparts a 'poetic energy' (Vaneigem p 130) to the radical perspectives presented. For example in the chapter on 'Isolation', Vaneigem uses the metaphor of the cage with an open door to convey the force of habit and history which kept people inside the cage, which comes to be identified as the place where the real and the important is located and how it became an instance not to try and imagine what might lie beyond the cage, which became nonetheless more and more painful (p 25) In his descriptions of public transport, of crowds, neon signs, Vaneigem contrasts the real and the illusory - the real need for community with the illusion of being together.



‘We have nothing in common except the illusion of being together...the seeds of an authentic collective life are lying dormant within the illusion itself...but real community remains to be created ’ (p.26)

Forms of distraction from drugs to alcohol are seen as magnifying the illusion.

‘(Alcohol) turns the concrete wall of isolation into a paper screen which the actors can tear according to their fancy, for it arranges everything on the stage of an intimate theatre A generous illusion, and thus still more deadly.’ (p 26)

Even lovers cannot overpower the general isolation in the world, and Vaneigem uses the metaphor of the ‘boat of love’ to convey how lovers encounter the world of isolation

‘The boat of love breaks up in the current of daily life.

Are you ready to smash the reefs of the old world before they wreck your desires?’ (p.27)

### **Metaphor and allegory**

The poetic lyricism of metaphor and allegory permeates Vaneigem's text, a 'poetic energy' serving as a means of evoking lived experience and a desire for its transformation:

‘After shattering myth, the tide of materialism has washed its fragments out to sea.’ (p.93)

‘life cracks in every direction under the blows of forced labour. Never before has a civilization reached such a degree of contempt for life; never before has a generation, drowned in mortification, felt such a rage to live.’ (p 37)

‘The man of survival...is a mutilated man. Where is he to find himself in the endless self-loss into which everything draws him? He is a wanderer in a labyrinth with no centre, a maze full of mazes ’ (p.123)

‘The spectacle, in ideology, art and culture, turns the wolves of spontaneity into the sheepdogs of knowledge and beauty.’ (p.84)

### **The Society of the Spectacle**

Debord's text, composed of numbered ‘theses’ (1 to 221) in Hegelian style, flows with an oracular tone and is delivered with an urgent gravity and certitude, which some interpret as pomp sity and arrogance The theses develop to form a critical perspective on existing reality and its conditions of separation and spectacle, intended to provide the means of inspiring a radical refusal of these conditions. They are organized in nine sections, from which highlights are presented below

#### *I Separation Perfected*

“... in the present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, fancy to reality, the appearance to essence, illusion only is sacred, truth profane.” (Feuerbach)

The ‘spectacle’, the result and the project of the existing mode of production, is underpinned by a set of social relations. The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images. (4)

All of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles, in which everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation (1). Unity and participation can no longer be established in societies where modern conditions of production prevail. The spectacle achieves a unification which is ‘nothing but an official language of generalized separation’ (2-3). At the root of the spectacle is the specialization of power, the oldest social specialization (23). The spectacle, and its forms as information or propaganda, advertisement or entertainment, is the existing order's uninterrupted discourse about itself, its laudatory monologue. The fetishistic appearance of spectacular relations conceals the fact that they are relations among men and classes (24).

## *II The Commodity as Spectacle*

[Quoting Lukacs]: the reification produced by commodity relations and the process of capitalist labour mechanization which results in an increase in *contemplative activity*. The spectacle is the moment when the commodity has attained the *total occupation* of social life (43), with the consumer as a consumer of illusions (47).

## *III Unity and Division within Appearance*

In regions where the economic conditions of capitalism have not achieved hegemony, modern society has already invaded the social surface of each continent by means of the spectacle. It defines the programme of the ruling class and presides over its formation (57).

The celebrity is the spectacular representation of a living human being (60). The star, whether the decision celebrity or politician, or consumption celebrity or film star, act out different roles, free to express themselves globally, identifying with the system and finding happiness through consumption. Being a star means specializing in the *seemingly lived*. The star is the object of identification with the shallow seeming life that has to compensate for the fragmented productive specializations which are actually lived. Celebrities exist to act out various styles of living and viewing society - unfettered, free to express themselves *globally*. They embody the inaccessible result of social *labour* by dramatizing its by-products magically projected above it as its goal *power* and *vacations*, decision and consumption (60,61).

The illusion of endless choice and competition in the abundance of spectacular forms develops into a competitive struggle, resurrecting oppositions such as regionalisms and racisms (62).

#### *IV The Proletariat as Subject and as Representation*

Class struggles must develop together with a dialectic and practice to create movement which operates on the totality of the world and dissolves all separation (75, 77, 78).

#### *V Time and History*

In the cyclical time experienced by prehistorical societies all knowledge is carried by the living (122). With the appropriation of time by class society and of humans as labour, history then passes before men as an alien factor (128). The birth of political power marks the moment when kinship ties begin to dissolve. The succession of generations then leaves the sphere of pure cyclical nature to become an event-oriented succession of powers. Irreversible time is the time of those who rule, and dynasties are its first measure. Writing is its weapon. With writing there appears a consciousness which is no longer carried and transmitted directly among the living: an *impersonal memory* (131).

While cyclical time continues to exist in traditional agricultural production, by the Middle Ages it is chewed away by history. With the commodity economy and the victory of the bourgeoisie, irreversible time eradicates this. History becomes understood as relentless movement in which individuals are sacrificed (141), and mass production allows irreversible time to triumph via its metamorphosis into the *time of things* (142).

#### *VI Spectacular Time*

Pseudo-cyclical time is returned to the daily life of commodity society as the time of consumption (147-150). Consumable pseudo-cyclical time is spectacular time - for example holidays, pseudo-festivals, the sale of sociability.

#### *VII The Organization of Territory*

Urbanism is capitalism's seizure of the natural and human environment, developing logically into absolute domination (169). With factories, halls of culture, tourists resorts and housing developments, urbanism recaptures and isolates the individual. Television and radio transmitting the spectacular message, enable the individual to fill his isolation with the dominant images - images which derive their power precisely from this isolation (172). Old urban centres are dislocated by the dictatorship of the automobile, the motorway, the enormous shopping centres - temples of frenzied consumption (174).

### *VIII Negation and Consumption within Culture*

Culture in class society is the locus of the search for lost unity, in which culture as a separate sphere is obliged to negate itself (180). The specialized disciplines of knowledge - philosophy, sociology - cannot explain social totality coherently (182). The theory of structuralism is the dream of the dictatorship of a pre-existing unconscious structure over all social praxis, regarding present conditions of spectacular communication as an absolute, the product of a society where communication exists in the form of a cascade of hierarchic signals. (201, 202).

The concept of the society of the spectacle is one conceived to destroy contemporary society though simultaneous theory and practice (203). This critical theory must be communicated in the language of contradiction, which must be dialectical in form as it is in content (204). The very mode of exposition of dialectical theory displays the negative spirit within it. The young Marx achieved the most consistent use of this *insurrectional style*, drawing the misery of philosophy out of the philosophy of misery (206).

### *IX Ideology Materialized*

In modern society, via the spectacle and the effective dictatorship of illusion, ideology has materialized and tailored all reality in terms of its model (212, 213). The spectacle is ideology par excellence, because it exposes and manifests in its fullness the essence of all ideological systems, the impoverishment, servitude and negation of real life (215). A true critique, which goes beyond the spectacle, must know how to wait, avoiding reformist compromises or trashy pseudo-revolutionary actions. This struggle and emancipation can take place only by collective means and via the de-alienated form of the workers' council (220, 221).

At the end of each section, Debord moves to a more positive rhetoric of reclaiming autonomy, for example calling for the rediscovering of the autonomy of place, appropriating labour and total history (178). The use of metaphor and allegory is more subtle and less prominent than in Vaneygem's text 'temples of frenzied consumption' (174) is a metaphorical evocation of a shopping centre, 'dictatorship of illusion' refers to the dominance of spectacle, of image (213). The poetic lyricism derives as much from the flavour of an incantation, descriptive passages and plays on words. Examples of Debord's descriptive critical edicts, aimed to evoke the experience of a false world of consumption, illustrate the lyricism in his style of oracular incantation:

'The pseudo-events which rush by in spectacular dramatizations have not been lived by those informed of them, moreover they are lost in the inflation of their hurried replacement at every throb of the spectacular machinery ' (157)

'When its vulgarized pseudo-festivals, parodies of the dialogue and the gift, incite a surplus of economic expenditure, they lead only to deception always compensated by the promise of a new deception ..the reality of time has been replaced by the *advertisement* of time.' (154)

The last phrase, on the reality of time replaced by the advertisement of time, adopts a play on words by inversion which is characteristic of both Vaneigem's and Debord's texts. Another example by Debord is his assertion that the critical theory needed to destroy the spectacle must be 'not a negation of style, but the style of negation' (204). This form of word play is influential on Turner's writing (see Chapter 7), for example when he writes of our greatest weapon as ridicule, for we live in a ridiculous world

### **Debord's society of the spectacle: discussion**

These key texts are explored here in order to examine the content of the ideas that have become one of the most important source of 20<sup>th</sup> century radical theory in anarchistic currents, and furthermore the source of their continuing appeal in such circles. The source of this appeal lies not only in their critique of hierarchy, totality and everyday life, but also I argue here, in their poetic and lyrical qualities. These form an essential aspect in their intention to evoke, in the sympathetic reader, an experiential sensation: of a critical perspective on the world and the taste of an alternative reality. As such, both texts exemplify Vaneigem's explicit intention to draw on, as Vaneigem puts it, the

'language of lived experience, which for me, merges with radical theory' (1983 p 75).

The texts also evince Debord's notion of a 'language of contradiction', the 'style of negation', a scandal, the 'very mode of exposition of dialectical theory display(ing) the negative spirit within it' (1987 thesis 206).

Both texts have a millenarian feel of a powerful sermon, a 'total revolutionary critique' as one post-Situationist put it (see Chapter 9 on Home). In this respect, they are products of their time, written in the radical fervour of the late 1960s, when the possibility of revolution seemed imminent.

Situationist ideas, in their counterposing of oppression and freedom, and of the spectacle and authentic participatory life, would be seen by postmodernists as part of the discredited left-wing thinking which posits the subject and culture as determined by language and discourse, outside of which there is no inner truth or authentic living to be discovered. Sadie Plant (1992) analyses Situationist texts as theory in the light of postmodern and poststructuralist discourse. Poststructuralist texts such as those by Deleuze and Guattari and Baudrillard have had a limited influence in anarchist currents. Critiques of Situationist ideas tend however to derive from perspectives unconnected to the poststructuralist rejection of the notion of authenticity and freedom. The stock response by many anarchists to Situationist texts, for example, is that 'you can't live like that': an interpretation of this response is examined below

My own approach in this chapter has been to take a more historicist position, analysing Situationist texts in terms of one of their original purposes, essentially as *propaganda*, and as communicating radical perspectives in the language of lived experience and through their poetic and lyrical appeal in evoking a critique of the world. It needs to be added that there could be many purposes to these texts, and, in relation to the discussion which now follows on how Situationist texts are used by individuals, there can also be an infinite variety of ways in which Situationist texts are used. My discussion therefore addresses the responses of those who have written about this, and some individuals with whom I have conversed.

### **'You can't live like that' and transforming everyday life in the here and now**

A stock response amongst anarchists is one which expressed admiration for their texts and the critique of the spectacle, but with the qualifier 'You can't live like that'. This raises the question of the difficulty perceived in moving from poetic experiential response to both living in the world and changing it, and the impossibility of living, in the contemporary world, outside of the spectacle. Richard, an anarchist, explained his own use of the commonly expressed response 'You can't live like that' as follows. In his view, the society of the spectacle has developed such that it envelops us more than ever, and it is not possible to stand outside of it. Situationist critiques are right, but the shock value of their critique in a purist form is not capable of being sustained in daily life. The Situationists themselves may not be exemplary in offering a sense of how to live, they may even have been obnoxious; and pro-situs (see chapter 6) or people who take up Situationist ideas in an obsessive form are a distraction (personal communication, 1999). What is interesting is how far those who have absorbed Situationist ideas are willing to allow them to inform their daily lives. Rick Turner, whose zines are discussed in Chapter 7, enjoys the ('spectacle') of following football matches of his local team in Stockport, and wrote of his enthusiasm in his book *In Your Blood* (1990). In many other respects, however, from the rejection of cars to the refusal of exotic holidays (explored in the zines), Turner's everyday life exemplifies the Situationist critique of the spectacle. In my personal life, I have found both anarchist, Situationist, anti-civilization and environmental critical ideas to be supportive – having a positive rather than negative effect – in finding a way of life that is as convivial as possible within the terms determined by our era of modern capitalism and, like Turner and many of those involved with *Here and Now* I refuse car ownership, exotic holidays and many other aspects of the spectacle.

For others, however, the critique of spectacular commodity life is absorbed and it becomes difficult to engage with enthusiasm with the range of daily tasks and distractions which are presented as normal and inevitable in contemporary life. Hayes speaks of the difficulty of some of those who had tasted an alternative reality in May 68 in returning to the conventional life of career and mortgage (see Chapter 3). Hayes himself, though resentful of the way in which he perceives critiques such as those of the Situationists as having undermined his own potential for

achieving success, nonetheless brings whatever notions of convivial living that he can to his own daily life (see also Chapter 3) The manner in which primitivist writer John Zerzan's way of life lives out his own perspectives is also addressed in Chapter 11.

For some, the ideas allow an understanding of the present as a historical process. Mike Peters writes in *Here and Now* of the effect of reading Debord as 'a bit like those legendary elixirs of immortality: once it has started to take effect, the reader ascends to a vantage point upon the present as a vantage point in history' (*Here and Now* 7-8 1989 pp.32-3). My intention here is not to over-dramatize the effect of absorbing the Situationist critique, but to indicate that, though it is not possible to live outside the spectacle, which does indeed envelop modern life, the critique derived from Situationist and other radical ideas nonetheless informs daily life and supports individuals in striving for activities towards convivial living in the here and now' (*Here and Now* Bulletin 1992 - see Chapter 8), and to activities which involve communicating alternative ideas (see for example Castoriadis's account of this in Chapter 2).

## Conclusions

This chapter has introduced key themes in the content of Situationist ideas and, addressing their potential resonance to contemporary audiences, argues that their ideas have more relevance than ever, with the spectacular inroads of commodity culture into every sphere of life.

Two key Situationist texts, Vaneigem's *Revolution of Everyday Life* and Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, are explored for the content of their ideas and the power of their lyrical poetic style in further evoking an oppositional response in the reader.

I also consider some responses by those in anarchist and post-Situationist milieux to Situationist writing, and consider the ramifications of the often voiced response that the Situationists' critique is vital, but that 'you can't live like that'.

The next chapter explores both some developments by French post-Situationists and the notion of an 'oppositional impulse' which arises not only as a cognitive and intellectual response, but on an emotional level. The chapters which follow explore post-Situationist milieux, and periodicals from the UK and USA, and ways in which anarchistic interventions have drawn on the Situationists' locations of critical perspectives and analyses of the contemporary world

## Chapter 5

### The oppositional impulse

#### French post-Situationists after May 68

This chapter, focusing primarily on the ideas of French post-Situationists writing in the aftermath of May 68, is important in several ways. Firstly, it begins my project of examining how Situationist ideas fell on fertile ground amongst anti-authoritarians in subsequent years. Secondly, the ideas discussed here are crucial in exploring further my notion of an oppositional 'impulse' which is located at an *emotional* level in the individual. Thirdly, the ideas discussed here, by Jean Barrot and Jacques Camatte, are themselves influential amongst anarchistic and radical currents, as will emerge particularly in Chapters 8, 11 and 12. And, lastly, both writers are important in theorising the effects of capitalist colonisation, an understanding of which is vital in exploring the oppositional impulse as a response to this penetration.

#### The experience of capitalist colonisation

I will begin this rather intricate set of tasks by exploring the latter - the theoretical insights of French post-Situationists, Barrot and Camatte, on the background of contemporary capitalism. Both writers are radical communists, schooled in the ideas of Marx, which may aid their theoretical capacity in one respect (one group of post-Situationists, such as Stewart Home and Luther Blisset, are quick to identify themselves as communists rather than anarchists, whom they perceive to be people with no theory). Both Barrot and Camatte, however, break with the authoritarianism of Marx and Marxism, and reject all the vanguardism associated with Marxist programmes of the party as the primary organisational model, and with the notion of seizing the power of the state.

Barrot writes that capital has managed to invade and dominate our lives to such an extent that the individual finds it increasingly difficult to realise and assert oneself in it, and is more and more separated from others, friends and neighbours, and from the environment (1974 p. 7).

Camatte sees capital as now having 'escaped' - that is, economic processes are now out of control, and those who are in a position to influence them now realize that they are powerless and outmanoeuvred. Capital imposes its despotism on human beings by investing objects and things with new modes of being, a world of things in rapid motion, constantly changing, creating a feeling of meaninglessness (1980 p. 11). The domestication of humanity arises when capital constitutes itself as community. The process begins with the fragmentation and destruction of human beings, who are then restructured in the image of capital and turned into capitalist beings. Capitalist society is death organised with a semblance of the appearance of life. Young



people still have the strength to refuse this death and rebel and demand to live. For most people, however, this demand to live seems irrational or over-idealistic, and they live on capitalism's empty dreams and fantasies (p.10)

Camatte's point about young people demanding to live is relevant in that radical environmental and anti-capitalist currents are primarily constituted by younger people. The vast majority of young people however are well ensconced in the ideology of advanced consumerism and the lure of icons of modern 'belonging' (capital constituting itself as community), such as mobile phones and cars, which act as powerful icons to young as well as older people. Camatte nonetheless sees chinks in the construction of what he sees as the 'reification' of the individual into an 'automaton of capital', since 'there is still the possibility that the whole construction could break apart' (p 17)

### **The emotional source of an oppositional impulse**

I want to turn now to further exploration of Barrot and Camatte's ideas to conceptualise the formation of an oppositional 'impulse' at the level of an emotional response. I argued in Chapter 1 that such an 'impulse' was a driving force underpinning radical currents, and that this was overlooked in sociological studies (such as Wall 1999). I have explored the power of Situationist texts in evoking an emotional response to the world through the poetic appeal of their writing (Chapter 4). This also supports the importance of writing, in texts as artefacts, in the processes constituting radical currents. The emotional response identified by Barrot and Camatte, and implicitly by the Situationists, is important in conveying that what I have termed the oppositional 'impulse' – a critical response to the world and the desire for transformation – occurs not merely at an intellectual and cognitive level, but on an emotional one.

Both Barrot and Camatte incorporate an awareness of the emotional response at work in those drawn to radical opposition. Both locate this response as arising out of a set of pre-existing needs for community, self-realisation and contact that cannot be met satisfactorily via capitalism's simultaneous destruction and co-optation of community. Barrot sees the desire for transformation<sup>1</sup> as arising out of real needs already at work but which cannot be satisfied under present conditions (1974 pp.52-3). It is not an ideal to be realised, but a movement which already exists, as an effort, as a task to prepare for (p.61). For Barrot, these ideas do not come from nowhere, they always appear because the symptoms of a real human community exist emotionally in every one of us. Whenever the false community of wage-labour is questioned, there appears a tendency towards a form of life in which relationships are no longer mediated by the needs of capital (ibid.)

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<sup>1</sup> the desired transformation for him being 'communism', the anti-authoritarian and non-statist version that has no connection with the bureaucratic state capitalism, posing as communism, which existed in USSR.

Camatte sees the desire for radical transformation as a desire to rediscover communication, and imagination and the resurgency of humanity (1980 p.4, 24) He sees May 68 as evidence of an eruption of this desire for new life, a future being which already exists as a total and passionately felt need. For Camatte, revolution means more than reclaiming just the totality, it is the reintegration of all that was separate, a coming together of future being, individuality and Gemeinwesen (ibid )

This notion of an emotional level of transformation was reached for in Marcuse's fusion of Freud and Marx (Marcuse 1955/69, 1964) Marcuse drew on Freud's notion of repression to analyse the role of the internalisation of authoritarianism in the reproduction of the totalitarianism of modern capitalist society. Alice Miller (1987) has written extensively on the myriad abuses of conventional child rearing and education which imprison the child, creating distress and, at worst, the reproduction of grandiosity, violence and cruelty in society. Miller's analyses provide insight into the processes by which children learn to adapt to and reproduce the brutality of the worlds into which they are born, and also how distress can be re-experienced and resolved, allowing recovery. In one passage she describes the source of nationalistic hatred of other nations, which she locates in the cruelty of conventional parenting; she speaks of the potential to process experience emotionally, allowing the individual to 'reclaim their lives and create in the here-and-now that which they so tragically missed in their own childhood truthfulness, clarity, and respect for themselves and others.' (Miller 1995 preface, 1987/1995 p.26)

Miller's insights complement those of Barrot and Camatte in examining the emotional ground of subjective and objective transformation. Barrot and Camatte invoke the emotionally felt need for community, which is one source of the desire to transcend the present world.

### **From theory to practice: capturing key elements in contemporary currents**

A key element underpinning post Situationist and anarchistic currents is the concern with something new, in *being* different and carrying out actions differently. This is highlighted in current anti-capitalist currents, in which the prevailing ethos is one of symbolic action incorporating spontaneous, creative, imaginative interventions (such as a large catapult in a demonstration in Quebec, 2001, which catapulted, not weapons, but soft toys; see Chapter 12) Those orthodox Marxist groups who now wish to recruit in anti-capitalist currents are perceived as out-of-tune with the imaginative, creative and libertarian ethos of the movement, in Britain the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) continues to print the same homogenous banners and chant unimaginative slogans, and is resented by those who reject their authoritarian and conventional political stance

This element is theorized well by both Barrot and Camatte. Barrot writes of the legacy of the Situationists in their emphasis on *being* different (the verb to be denoting the sense of transforming the totality and on subjectivity).

'In spite of their shortcomings, the Situationist International has shown ..it is not only important to understand the historical movement and to act accordingly, but also *to be* something different from the attitudes and values of the society the revolutionary wants to destroy.' (1974 p 7)

Barrot sees the commitment to being something different as implying a radical break with politics and as manifesting itself in myriad ways.

'the task is to express (in a text or an action) a subversive relation to the world. However big or small, such an act is an attack against the old world.' (ibid )

This then includes the writing and production of texts as an aspect of the activity working towards transformation, which is of note since writing and publishing are primary activities of anarchistic currents. Actions which are deemed evidence of the refusal of the present world, and of an effort to build a new one, range from the refusal of assembly-line work to the struggles of squatters to the recycling of wasted goods (p.53). In these actions, the relations between people and to the acts themselves are subversive and they reach for "something else", having a potential which needs consciousness and understanding (ibid.).

Camatte's notion of the desire for transformation, which he terms 'communism', is not a mode of production, as Marx would have it, but a 'mode of being' (1980 p.19). Like Barrot, Camatte uses the verb 'to be' to denote the elements of totality and subjectivity involved in creating something new.

Camatte argues for a refusal of all obsolete forms of struggle - demonstrations, marches, spectacles He sees waving banners, handing out leaflets and attacking the police as 'all activities which perpetuate a certain ritual - a ritual in which the police are always cast in the role of invincible subjugators. There has to be refusal of the old terrain of struggle - both in the workplace and in the streets.' (1980 p.15)

Camatte argues for reviving the human essence which is preserved in each individual, whether they have undergone a 'reification into an automaton of capital' or whether they are a policeman (14-15, 17) This cannot be done by a programme of violence, and Camatte rejects outright the idea of a physical extermination of one class or group of people He writes,

'How can you celebrate a revolution with a rifle butt? .

'If right from the outset people are denied all possibility of their humanity, how can they subsequently be expected to emerge as real human beings. So it is as human beings that they must be confronted...they have to be put into the context of their humanity, for humanity is what they too know they are a part of and are potentially able to find again.' (pp.14-15)

Camatte argues rather for making the chains not only visible but shameful, with each individual experiencing a sense of crisis and a sense of human resurgence In his view this can never happen if the old methods of provocation-repression-subversion are used We need, he writes, to

find new methods, such as treating all institutions with contempt and ridicule by leaving them trapped and isolated in their own concerns.' (p 17)

This ethos of exposing to playful ridicule the pomposity of bureaucrats and world leaders is an important element in contemporary anarchistic currents. from the tactic of custard pieing which is widespread across the world (for example, the pieing of US delegate Frank Loy at the Hague Climate Change talks, November 2000) to the struts and waving wands of pink fairies in v ew of suited bureaucrats at the Conference of the IMF and World Bank, Prague September 2000, the desire to bring about a human resurgence in thoe engaged in symbolic acts of protest appears a significant impulse. The art of custard pieing derives from Situationist-influenced anarchists and was popularised by a Belgian, Noel Godin, who, with the International Baking Brigade has 'entarted' the 'great and the wicked' since 1969 (*Carbusters* 11 March 2001 pp 12-13). Frank Loy was unable to continue with the press conference after he was tarted with a black forest gateau, by two women 'Cherry Pie' and 'Sushi' (who are able to run away into the night afterwards) (ibid.). Such actions incorporate the Situationist emphasis on play and spontaneity, and their representation of a break with orthodox politics is theorized explicitly by Camatte. Turner's zines also draw explicitly on the idea of ridicule (see Chapter 7).

### **Critique of self-management**

The notion of 'self-management' was strong in May 68. Barrot however notes the disparity between the thought of a different world in May 68, and the talk which rarely went beyond the notion of general self-management (1974 p.60). Barrot argues that, rather than aiming for management by the masses, we need to aim for the transformation of social life (p.120). Both Camatte and Barrot present a critique of the notion of self-management. As Camatte argues, 'What's the point of occupying the factories - like car factories for example - where production must be stopped anyway? The cry goes up: "Occupy the factories and manage them ourselves!" So all the prisoners of the system are supposed to take over their prisons and begin the self-management of their own imprisonment.' (1980 p 16).

### **Influential perspectives: activism and organisation**

Barrot draws on Vaneigem's critique of the militant, which is an important one in contemporary post Situationist and activist currents (see Chapters 7 and 12). Barrot describes the splits in the self involved in taking up a militant attitude which splits the individual in two, 'separating his needs, his real individual *and* social needs, the reason why he cannot stand the present world, from his action, his attempt to change his own life as well as society in general. He represses the impulse which made him turn against society. He submits to revolutionary action as if it were external to him' (1974 p 7)

Here is the Situationist emphasis on transforming the self, on being different as well as transforming everyday life and the totality

Barrot constructs a radical perspective on what constitutes true democracy, rejecting the conventional notion of democracy as nothing but a dictatorship, and rejecting delegation as undemocratic. In Barrot's view, organisation of all activities of life needs to involve the direct participation of all individuals (1974 p.42)

For Camatte, all political groups are gangs or rackets, and the need to belong to a group arises from the fear of being alone, the fear of individuality, autonomy and independence (1980 p 8). This notion has found influence in some spheres (see particularly Chapters 8 and 12).

### **Beyond leftism**

Barrot and Camatte's ideas are commensurate with anarchism in their rejection of hierarchical organisation, of seizing state power and of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Another overlap with anarchism is the stress on any form of action, from the production of texts, to actions as disparate as squatting or recycling goods, forming an element of oppositional struggle. In some respects they go beyond anarchism, for example in Barrot's notion of the participation of all individuals in organising their needs (with a rejection of delegation and conventional democracy), and Camatte's rejection of political groups as gangs or rackets. Both further the Situationist emphasis on total transformation, on the need for being different in terms of attitudes, values, gestures, and this forms a strong ethos on the interventions discussed in this thesis, including those of the radical environment and anti-capitalist movements.

Barrot and Camatte's contributions in this respect are the more surprising because of their initial ideas developed through the influence of radical left libertarian communism. Camatte worked as secretary to Italian left communist Amadeo Bordiga during the 1950s. Bordiga was first General Secretary of the Italian Communist Party, formed in 1921. Though Bordiga's Marxism was rigidly orthodox, based on centralised organisation and the role of The Party, the more radical aspect of his ideas was his rejection of all ideas of workers' control since he believed that this would be merely a continuation of capitalism. Bordiga also believed in the abolition of money, of property and of the market. Bordiga was imprisoned by fascists in 1923, and Gramsci took over his position, but he was associated with the Italian Communist Party from the end of World War II to his death in 1970.

Camatte came to reject the authoritarianism of the Bordiguist tradition during the 1960s, and is believed to have worked as a school teacher. From the 1970s through to 1999, he has been involved in the French journal *Invariance*, in which he continues to develop his anti-authoritarian critical ideas.

Barrot, also writing as Gilles Dauve, is a historian of left communism and translator. He also was involved, from the 1970s, in a journal, *Interrogations*, which continued to develop anti-

authoritarian ideas an exchange between a writer for *Interrogations* and the US journal *First Estate*, is discussed in Chapter 11. The two writers carried out a critical but respectful dialogue with each other via the forum of the two journals during the 1970s and 1980s.

Both Barrot and Camatte are sometimes referred to as ultra-leftists. The term more precisely refers to the tradition of council communism originating from theorists such as Pannekoek (c 1940s) and Gorter (1920). Council communism was an important influence on the Situationists, and during May 68 these ideas were put into action in the formation of non-hierarchical workers' councils

### **Conclusions: the significance of Barrot and Camatte**

I have drawn from Barrot and Camatte elements which explore further my notion of the 'impulse', experienced at an emotional level as a critical response to the world, which is an important element underpinning oppositional currents. For both writers, the need for another world, for human community, exists inside everyone one of us as a passionately felt need, which capitalism attempts to divert in its colonisation of human needs. In this sense, both assume an essentialist species being requiring community and sociality, in this their ideas overlap with those of Marx in his early work, with the majority of anarchists, and the libertarian Marxist anthropologist, Stanley Diamond.

Barrot and Camatte's writing, in drawing on the Situationists and on the experience of May 68, and a critical re-evaluation of Marx and of council communism, are also a manifestation of the development of ideas through a relationship to the past. The writing of Camatte in particular has subsequently become influential in post-Situationist and anti-capitalist currents, and this is explored in Chapters 8 and 12.

## Chapter 6

### **The Situationists and beyond: post-Situationist milieux**

Alongside the critical content, the lyrical and poetic elements of Situationist rhetoric, as conveyed in Chapter 4, may be one source of their appeal to subsequent generations of radicals open to the critique of the totality which Situationist ideas present. The visionary qualities of Situationists text and the poetic rhetoric are less in evidence in the post-Situationist interventions discussed in the following chapters, though the flavour is continued in some, for example in the rants which are a feature of *Anti Clock-wise* (see Chapter 7).

This can be set against the changing backdrops in which these interventions emerged. The Situationist International had its hey-day in the late 1960s, when radical oppositional impulses flourished across the world, and reached its apogee in 1968. The euphoria and optimism for radical change, and the extent of the libertarian currents at work at this time, is conveyed in Chapter 3. The post-Situationist texts which emerged during the 1970s, by radical communists Camatte and Barrot<sup>1</sup>, represent a continuation of the sense that revolution was still possible in the near future, together with a concern to learn from the events of 1968 and from key radical libertarian texts such as those of the Situationists.

A parallel development during the 1970s was the uptake of Situationist ideas into anarchist circles in the UK and USA, which is discussed below. A rather jaundiced account of the early pro-Situationist milieu in the USA has been contributed from various writings by people directly involved in the milieu (Gray 1974; Black 1994; Barrot 1987), and I include in this chapter some discussion of the more negative elements associated with these initial 'spin-offs' in the pro-Situ milieu in the USA where the charges of 'monsters', 'monstrous offspring', and 'true megalomania of priesthood' are analysed and evaluated as to how much these are directly attributable to the Situationist project itself

The interventions, mainly periodicals, discussed in chapters 6-11, are all broadly within a post-Situationist and anarchist milieu, and the nuances of their particularly angles and milieux will emerge chapter by chapter. Aficionados or cognoscenti of the Situationist project tend to relate to it either relatively uncritically, as in the 'pro-Situ' camp, or ultra critically as in what I have termed the 'critical cleric' camp. The interventions discussed in chapters 6-11 do not fall strongly into either camp, and, with the exception of Stewart Home and perhaps *Here and Now*, their use of Situationist ideas is not accompanied by an obsessive focus on the minutiae of their history, as it is in the pro-Situ and 'critical cleric' camps. They are discussed here because both

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<sup>1</sup> Camatte (1975, 1978 1981 1995) Barrot (1974 1987)

show a strong relationship to a sphere of the past - the Situationist International - in their social networks and interventions.

This section is an ethnographic delineation of circles whose common ground is a relationship to the Situationists, and the social relationships (supportive or antagonistic) within them. My understanding of these circles has been reached, and this chapter is informed by, my experience as an observant participant (and participant observant), through social occasions and conversations, and through my own evaluation and interpretation of these. I have also drawn on participants' own written representations of the world of which they are a part. This section therefore integrates convivial interviews and texts to clarify interactions, relationships and discursive fields.

The chapter finally moves to a more personal ethnographic account of events and social gatherings in the post-Situationist milieus, in order to convey more convivial dimensions that become lost in the more discursive and interpretative evaluations of the legacy of the Situationists amongst their earlier adherents.

### **Signifiers and the term 'milieu'**

Here I consider the significance of the term 'milieu' in highlighting a series of circles of aficionados of the Situationists. The use of the term signifies to others a knowledge of the Situationists, common to both the 'pro-' and more critical camps.

Amongst this milieu, the Situationists are always referred to as the S.I., short for Situationist International (whereas I have chosen in my writing mostly to refer to the Situationists to refer to them or their project). The term 'milieu', used to refer to their own or other related circles, is also commonly used in Situationist tracts themselves, and I would deduce that this has contributed to its currency amongst aficionados of the S.I.

The word 'milieu' its obvious y a French import into the English language, and, in one definition, refers to 'middle, centre, midst, medium, heart, circle, environment, society, sphere' (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary* 1934 1963) Particularly relevant are the words 'midst', 'circle' and 'sphere'. The use of the word by those in the 'milieu' can be interpreted both as expressing the experience of connectedness (even if sometimes antagonistic) of others with the same interest in and focus on the S I , and as a signifier of one who is in the know or 'au fait' with the S I To offer some examples of the word in use, Rick Turner (see Chapter 7) wrote to me in 1999, when he was no longer producing his zines, and mentioned that he had 'lost touch with the milieu' Bob Black, in his own characterisation of the post-Situationist milieu of which he is a part, coined the phrase 'the marginals milieu' (Black 1994). Another example in print is a bibliography of texts by and about the Situationists, which was compiled by a participant in the milieu (Ford 1995). Ford heads two sections 'British Pro-Situs and Milieu' and 'American Pro-Situs and Milieu'



What is significant here is the way in which, at one level, the term 'milieu' carries a signifier of belonging *and* a kind of cultural capital and distinctiveness in Bourdieu's sense. At another level, it is used by committed radicals to *differentiate* themselves from mainstream writers whose focus on the Situationists emerges from professional or academic purposes (for example the curators of the ICA exhibition on the Situationists in 1988). Mainstream texts (eg Blazwick ed 1988; Marcus 1989; Hussey 2001) focus on the radical image of the Situationists more than the content of their theory and practice and its influence on subsequent generations. Those in the 'milieu', then, are those who focus on the Situationists as part of a project concerned with social transformation, and who are part of a do-it-yourself self-funded current. The sense of belonging, then, which is unconsciously captured in the word 'milieu', also expresses a sense of differentiation with those who are not primarily motivated by the project of transformation.

This highlights, in ethnographic terms, the conscious creation of social worlds linked by both an interest in the Situationists, and the primary concern with radical social transformation. The relationships within this milieu are discussed in more detail below

### **Knowledge, obsession and the driving force amongst cognoscenti**

Such is the almost obsessive focus on and research into the Situationists and every detail of who said, wrote or did what and when, that virtually no-one outside of the 'milieu' itself could match this intimate and detailed knowledge. Mainstream writers and curators have tended to rely on participants in the milieu to aid their research. For example popular music writer Greil Marcus relied on pro-Situ Tom Ward in his account of the Situationist uptake in punk in the book *Lipstick Traces* (Black 1994 p.90); Situationist painter Ralph Rumney, speaking of the curators of the 1988 ICA exhibition on the Situationists, complained that 'neither of them struck me as a serious expert. They were asking questions about things I'd expect them to know' (Home (ed) 1996 p.139)

Another illustration of this intensive focus on every detail of Situationist phenomena is illustrated below with reference to a meeting of the Anarchist Research Group

The focus on the Situationists by those in the camps outlined below appears to become something of a driving force in their lives, generating volumes of debate via leaflets or papers, as will be touched on in Chapter 9 on Home and Vague

### **Pro-Situ or uncritical cognoscenti or aficionados**

'Pro-Situ' is a term often used in a rather derogatory sense to refer to those who produce texts which are heavily focussed on continuing the Situationist project in a somewhat uncritical manner. The derogatory connotation of the term is exploited by those 'cognoscenti' or 'aficionados' (see below for characterisation) who *know* that Debord denounced slavish

followers of the S.I. as 'pro-Situs' (in a text in the journal *Internationale Situationiste*). The term therefore probably derives from the kind of one-upmanship which is an aspect of pro-Situ and 'cognoscenti' circles (see below).

Some of the imprints of those in the UK and USA often categorised as 'pro-Situs' include BM Blob, BM Combustion and BM Chronos in the UK (all the individuals involved in these live in London) and Bureau of Public Secrets in California, USA. To be noted here is the creative literary element in the choice of names for the BM (British Monomark) addresses, which are used as an alternative to Post Office numbers. Blob and Combustion appear to convey visual images of an indeterminate form (Blob) and a spontaneous uprising (Combustion) with a note of menace which is part of the post-Situationist project (though as the following chapters will show, I frequently cite the contrast between the menacing rhetoric and slogans and the affable individuals behind them); Chronos has a literary connotation with a reference to the Greek god of time. All these imprints continue to be active in selling and publishing texts to the year 2001.

Pro-situ groups were an aspect of an emerging 'scene' in the 1970s in the UK and USA, where an important contributor was Ken Knabb, who lives in Berkeley, California, and who published an anthology (Knabb ed 1981) of translations of texts, including translations from the journal *Internationale Situationiste*. There were several pro-Situ grouplets in existence during the 1970s in the USA, mainly in New York and San Francisco. These included For Ourselves, Negation and Point Blank. Some individuals involved in these groups had met as students and/or teachers at Berkeley, and went on to form a magazine called *Processed World*, which continued into the 1990s, and aimed to expose the banality of everyday life, particularly targeting the experience of office workers. Berkeley, and the University there appears to have been a point of contact for individuals collaborating on Situationist and council communist influenced projects (as does London in the UK, though in London there was no university involved in the 'scene').

To give some biographical details about some of those involved in pro-Situ imprints: the BM Blob imprint (see a critique of one of their pamphlets on rebel violence by *Here and Now* in chapter 8) consists of two brothers, Dave and Stuart Wise, who were from the 1970s resident in Notting Hill, London; BM Combustion consists of Nick Brandt, of north London, who is a relative of the photographer Bob Brandt; BM Chronos consists of Michel Prigent, who has, with Lucy Forsyth, translated and published various Situationist texts.

These imprints publish a variety of texts, generally in pamphlet or booklet form, drawing on Situationist ideas to analyse contemporary phenomena. Chronos has produced translations of writings by Debord (Debord 1979, Debord and Sanguinetti 1974)). The charge, by McFarlane of *Here and Now* that such pro-Situ projects are merely self-indulgent 'alternative hobbies' (see Chapter 8) seems perhaps over critical, since these interventions still contribute to the availability of radical texts, particularly as translations.

A more populist approach was taken by one pro-Situ, Larry Law who produced throughout the 1980s several illustrated pocket-sized books in the series 'Spectacular Times', with

simplified forms of Situationist theory and rhetoric. These reached a wider audience than the material produced for example by the imprints Blob, Combustion and Chronos. Larry Law died suddenly of cancer when he was in his forties at the end of the 1980s.

### **Aficionados, cognoscenti, critical clerics in the anti-pro-Situationist milieu**

This circle of critical aficionados is no bigger in numbers, perhaps even smaller, than the pro-Situ milieu discussed above. Some of the adherents in this circle include, in the USA, Bob Black who writes critical accounts of anarchist and related currents, and, in the UK, Stewart Home and Luther Blisset (see Chapter 9) and Simon Ford, who is a curator at the National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and who compiled an extensive bibliography of texts by and about the Situationist International.

In this circle the relationship with the Situationist International (SI) is one which combines ardour with antagonism. A knowledge, sometimes obsessively detailed, of the texts and history of the SI is mixed with a strong desire to attack the project of the Situationists and what is seen as their status as gurus for pro-Situs. It is possible that, underneath the apparently negative focus is an unstated but implicit attraction to the ideas, and the critique of the totality, in the Situationist project. This attraction perhaps becomes overwhelmed and lost in the desire to participate in the milieu of cognoscenti by 'playing the game' - to compete in the pro-Situ tendency towards clerical, or even rubinical, interest in the minute details of SI texts and history, but without being seen to be the slavish fan or pro-Situ denounced by Debord. One effect of this is that the status is confirmed by merely being inverted - rather in the way that Satanists are Christians by inversion.

An example which illustrates this intense focus combined with derision was a talk on May '68 and the Situationists (by S. Hayes for the Anarchist Research Group in January 1996). Several of those who could be included in the 'critical cleric' camp, including Stewart Home and Luther Blisset, attended, and because publicity for the meetings is limited to a small mailing, those from this camp who attended would have heard about the meeting through a mutually informative network relaying any material of interest.

Three out of five cognoscenti from the critical camp were wearing dark bomber jackets (which at the time was a signifier of a hard 'macho' skinhead identity, though in this case the wearers were clearly not skinheads, suggesting a playful appropriation of signifiers by a group of intellectual people on the fringes of anarchism). This suggested a high degree of commonality in terms of self presentation and style. During the talk the speaker referred to minor details of Situationist phenomena, and on one or two occasions one of the cognoscenti interrupted swiftly with a correction to Hayes' memory or version of a detail. The correction was made with some intensity and no self-irony, such that a couple of others of those attending exchanged smiles of surprise and amusement.

After the meeting, the circle of anti-pro-Situ critical clerics expressed some amused derision about the talk and what they had learnt from it, which was little more than a minor detail about Guy Debord having a reputation as a good cook. The implication was that their knowledge of the Situationists' involvement in May 68 was so detailed and complete that they had learnt almost nothing. This was despite the fact that the talk had consisted of a very personal account of Hayes' experience of the events and his encounter with the Situationists.

### **Rivalries and feuds between pro-situs and critical clerics**

There is a mutual antagonism between pro-Situ milieux and the critical cleric/afficionado circles, and this antagonism from time to time erupts into full-blown feuds in print (for example between Stewart Home and Michel Prigent, though Home tends to have several feuds in print going on at once - see Chapter 9). Those in the anarchist milieux who know of the existence of such feuds (through word of mouth or listings of 'feud' literature) comment on a sense of bafflement with the intensity of such antagonism (for example, a wry comment was made in one journal, *Do or Die*, about an ongoing feud between Home and *Green Anarchist*, which 'only someone who was already mad (viz the participants)...would ever dream of wading into' [*Do or Die* 9 pp.225-6]).

I want here to analyse the elements at work in these various circles and their criticisms of each other. The most important motivation in these criticisms is the desire to go beyond the limitations perceived in existing projects (in the same way as academics carve out new spheres through critiques of existing bodies of work - except that, in the case of radicals, there is a genuine desire that their projects contribute towards the development of opposition to the existing world). Another factor at work may be the sense of a need to carve out new spheres and to emphasise other forms of 'symbolic capital' (to use Bourdieu's notion as expounded in *Distinction* 1979) to those already apparently 'owned' in existing projects. The feud (see below) between Stewart Home of the 'anti-Situ/critical cleric aficionado' circle, and Michel Prigent of the 'pro-Situ' camp, is primarily underpinned by a contempt for the other's project: Michel Prigent, with Lucy Forsyth, has met Guy Debord and translated some Situationist texts (Debord 1974, 1979), and is motivated by a desire to promote the ideas of the Situationists. Stewart Home's own impetus in studying Situationist texts (see Chapter 9) stems from his early introduction to them, when he was told they were the total revolutionary critique. His response to this admiration of Situationists texts was to debunk them. In what is undoubtedly a complex set of social, psychological and intellectual tensions in the longterm feud between Home and Prigent, one factor might be a strong sense mutual resentment.

### **Characterising the milieu and the aesthetic and anarchist input**

#### **The aesthetic legacy**

The aesthetic and artistic origins of the Situationist project continue to influence many post-Situationist projects, in terms of their use of visual images and détournement (see particularly Chapter 7) I want here to highlight a tension, however, between the more mainstream focus on the Situationists, which tends towards the aesthetic, and the focus of the anti-authoritarian post-Situationist milieu, in which the radical political critique of the totality is the primary focus

This tension is part of the history of the S I itself, as shown in Chapter 3, which outlines the split in 1962 between the two factions, after which the S.I increasingly concentrated on developing a theoretical critique and on disseminating ideas via texts.

The S I.'s historical links with the 'avant garde' has contributed to a tendency in mainstream historicisation to aestheticise the S.I. This was particularly evident in the 1988 Institute of Contemporary Art exhibition in London (also shown in Paris and in Boston, USA): alongside paintings and other artworks by members of the S I., Situationist texts (and pro- and post-Situationist texts) appeared in glass cases, and slogans of Situationist origin from May, 68 appeared carefully lettered on a wall. This both aestheticized the S.I. and its legacy, and separated it from the main ground in which the contemporary post-Situationist milieu intersects, which is broadly the anarchist movement, as discussed further below. The disembedding of the cultural forms from their social and political context appeared also to have the effect of mystifying them and presenting them literally as objects of contemplation - on walls, in glass cases.

### **The anarchist context of the Situationist legacy**

The uptake of Situationist ideas in the UK and USA into the *anarchist* movement is an essential aspect in understanding its legacy, as this thesis demonstrates. The anarchist context of the Situationist legacy is not always highlighted sufficiently even in texts by those with some knowledge of this intersection.

For example George Robertson, in an account of the penetration of the S I. into British culture (Robertson 1988), refers to the 'anarcho-situ' milieu to which the Special Branch linked the Angry Brigade, and cites the 'interlocking network of anarcho-syndicalist libertarian currents' - but only in reference to the means by which the libertarian socialist group Socialisme ou Barbarie gained widespread currency. Apart from these references, the anarchist context is overlooked, thus ignoring the fact that these such projects are connected to and supported by the anarchist movement and its social and distribution networks

Another example of a text produced from within the milieu is Simon Ford's bibliography of texts by and about the S I (Ford 1995). Ford refers briefly to the problem even in the term 'pro-situ', a label which he sees as often giving 'too much credit to the S I at the expense of other more obvious influences, such as anarchism and libertarianism' (ibid p.xii). His introduction

however tends to emphasise the avant garde origins of the S I , which neglects the anarchist tradition and milieu in which the Situationist legacy has mainly found root Ford's characterisation of contemporary Situationist-influenced activity as a 'rich culture of "underground" publishing' (ibid p.xi) again neglects the anarchist contexts. This rich culture is not so much 'underground', a term which suggests a deliberate cultivation of semi-deviant hidden activity which is not an accurate representation, as simply self-organised. If it is marginalised and hidden from the mainstream, it is not by choice but because the ideas are marginalised, outside of the spectrum deemed acceptable in the dominant culture and media

Bob Black, in his history of the 'marginals milieu' (of which he is a part), refers to the milieux as 'beneath the underground'. Black is more explicit about the anarchist background to the uptake of Situationist ideas in the USA, but presents this as unintentional: he writes that the US pro-situ grouplets 'without intending to, insinuated situationism into the somewhat resurgent American anarchism of the 1970s' (Black 1994 p.90)

The unintentional aspect of this process does not seem born out by the more intentional processes at work: for example anarchist Fredy Perlman translated Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* and published it under the Black and Red imprint in Detroit in 1970, suggesting a conscious intention to disseminate Situationist texts amongst a sympathetic audience, including those of an anarchist persuasion. This is paralleled in the UK, where the initial translators, such as Christopher Gray and Paul Sieveking, of Situationist texts, were involved in anarchist currents (personal communication from one participant, Kathy, 1996).

### **Anarchism and the aesthetic dimension of Situationist origins**

Black sees the uptake of Situationist ideas into anarchism as taking place via texts, which obscured the 'artistic' origins of the S I , but that this reflected the division within and development of the S.I. itself. As he writes,

'The thing about this accretion of texts is that they were just that, texts. Nobody knew about the artistic origins of the SI or the aesthetic preoccupations of its earliest years The Debordists (referring to the split with Constant, Jorn and other artists) had their reasons for concealing their own artistic roots the better to come off as social theorists, and so it was as politics that situationism captivated a small but growing number of Britons and North Americans from the mid-1970s ' (Black 1994 pp.90-91)

Black contrasts the way in which the aesthetic element is present in Christopher Gray's translation and anthology of texts from the *Internationale Situationiste* (Gray 1974) but absent in Ken Knabb's anthology (1981) As Black writes, Gray's *Leaving the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* contains 'enough of the cartoons and graphics to resemble the original look-and feel of the S I journal' (Black 1994 p 91) but that Ken Knabb's anthology 'out-Deborded Debord in marginalising the

aesthetic dimension'. In Black's view, this has over-emphasised Situationist ideas as political, 'diminishing the holism of the tendency and perhaps contributing to Situationist theory's exaggerated reputation for aridity' (ibid)

During the 1980s, several of those in the post-Situationist milieu collaborated on a series of installations in art galleries (see below), which represents a continuation of the aesthetic dimension of the S.I.'s origins

### **Earlier Situationist-inspired grouplets and the origins of megomania**

In the following two sections, I want to outline the legacy of the Situationists in considering evaluations by Christopher Gray, a member of King Mob. Gray asserts that some of the more negative aspects of Situationist-inspired groups, at least those of the 1970s, can be attributed to the S.I. project itself. It raises the question as to whether elements such as virulence and intransigence can be communicated to future generations via texts.

### **King Mob, Leaving the 20th Century, and the charge of 'monstrous'**

During the 1970s and 1980s, some key texts which helped introduce Situationist ideas to English-speaking anarchist circles initiated a perception of the grouplets of the 1970s influenced by the Situationist International as its 'monstrous offspring' (Gray 1974 p.166). In Gray's view, the negative aspects of the S.I. were responsible for this 'monstrous offspring' and 'megomania of priesthood'.

Before evaluating the extent to which these negative perceptions are directly attributable to intrinsic qualities of the Situationist project itself, I want to give some background about Christopher Gray, who was involved in an English group of the Situationist International during the 1960s. This is important in two ways: firstly, because he was a key figure in the Situ scene in the UK and his own path contributes to an understanding of developments in the 1960s and 1970s; and secondly, because his analysis of problems in the Situationist project, and his own very personal account of his response to it, form insights into the lived and experiential world of the project and its associates. The account also contributes biographical and historical details of associations formed at this time.

With a group of others, Christopher Gray had begun publishing in the 1960s the radical magazine *Heatwave*, the ideas of which presented a critique of the totality (calling for the creation of 'the revolutionary praxis by which this society and this civilisation can be destroyed, once and for all' (*Heatwave* no 2 October 1966 quoted in Blazwick (ed) 1988 p 65) The group briefly became members of the Situationist International (English section) until 1967, when they were, like nearly every other member over the years, expelled. The other people involved in *Heatwave* and the English section of the S.I. were Donald Nicholson-Smith, who continues to

be active in translating Situationist texts during the 1990s; Charles Radcliffe; and Tim Clark, now a well-known art historian

After their expulsion from the S.I. they reformed as King Mob, named after graffiti from the 18th century Gordon Riots. King Mob's most famous act was to enter the London department store Selfridges, with one member dressed up as Father Christmas, handing out toys blatantly taken from Selfridges shelves to children. King Mob were apparently responsible for the huge painted slogan, 'SAME THING DAY AFTER DAY...' mentioned in Chapter 1.

King Mob consisted of the same group involved in Heatwave and several others, including Dave and Stuart Wise (later of BM Blob pro-situ projects see above); Paul Sieveking, who was the initial English co-translator of Vaneigem's *Revolution of Everyday Life* and who went on to found *Fortean Times*, a magazine focussed on 'flying saucer' and unexplained phenomena, which now has mainstream distribution; John Fullerton; and Malcolm McLaren, who later became the punk entrepreneur who managed the punk band the Sex Pistols. Christopher Gray himself later became interested in forms of mysticism and is a translator.<sup>2</sup>

### Monsters and megalomania

I want to excavate how these labels of monsters and megalomania, referred particularly to the US pro-Situ scene of the 1970s, emerged in discourse from the post-Situationist milieu itself. The first reference arises in a written communication to Christopher Gray (see above) from a correspondent in the USA; the second reference is from post-Situationist radical communist Barrot and an English translator of his text. I will quote Gray's US correspondent's estimation at length, and analyse its content before evaluating the extent to which the Situationist project itself was responsible for this.

'Seen from over here, the S.I. has a lot to answer for: it has spawned a whole stew of "revolutionary organisations", usually composed of half a dozen moralists of the transparent relationship: these have inevitably foundered after a few months - though not without bequeathing weighty self-criticism to a breathless posterity. Idiots Worse: *cures* [Latin for priests] Yet their traits are undoubtedly linked organically, genetically, to the original S.I. in its negative aspects. the S.I. is responsible for its monstrous offspring. Somehow or other, the S.I.'s

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<sup>2</sup>To show how circles intersect, Christopher Gray at one time shared a flat with S. Hayes (whose experiences of May 68 in France are documented in Chapter 3), and who was at Oxford University simultaneously with David Goodway, an anarchist writer and historian. Goodway and Hayes met up again in the anarchist milieu in London during the late 1960s. To show how such circles intersect with wider circles over time, during the 1990s I met two individuals in very different areas both of whom had previously been involved with circles included in this chapter. One was a woman who I met as part of a network of families educating children out of school, she had been friends during the 1970s with both Sieveking and Gray (see above). Another woman was one I met through a co-counselling course, who had been acquainted with members of the Angry Brigade.



"original sin" is tied up with a shift from the sardonic megalomania of iconoclasm to the true megalomania of priesthood'. (quoted in Gray 1974 p 166).

There are several points of interest here. First the writer gives a succinct characterisation of the short-lived nature of the US pro-Situ projects and their publishing ventures (for a 'breathless posterity' - presumably a sarcastic reference to their writing for future generations who will marvel at their critical self-reflection). Secondly, the writer compares their relationship to the S.I. as being that of priests, a 'megalomania of priesthood', conveying the notion of a religious devotion and a love of the power that goes with being the expert and commander of this religion - and which overlaps with my characterisation of some contemporary circles of post-Situationists as 'critical clerics' (see above).<sup>3</sup>

Thirdly, the passage quoted above refers to pro-Situs in 1970s America as the S I's 'monstrous offspring' - a perception and characterisation which finds an echo in the writing of Barrot (very likely as a direct result of reading Gray's publication, though possibly without consciously reproducing some of its terminology). The reference here is his pamphlet *What is Situationism?*, his critical account of the S.I. (which first appeared in 1979 in a periodical *Red Eye* in Berkeley, USA and was published in pamphlet form in 1987 by Unpopular Books, in which Luther Blissett (see above) was involved.)

Barrot writes of the weaknesses of the S.I. as having become 'fodder for a public of monsters.. (who) have nothing between them but *psychological* problems' (1987 p.44)

The point about psychological problems is a relevant one which I take up again later. Here I am specifically interested in Barrot's use of the word 'monsters', which echoes Gray's US correspondent's use of the word 'monstrous' with reference to the pro-Situ scene. The words 'monster' and 'monstrous' carry a heavily negative and rather damning meaning denoting people who are truly objectionable. The words suggest a marked animosity and irritation felt by the writers towards pro-Situ activities. It is significant however that the term 'monster' was used from the end of the 18th century by writers such as Edmund Burke to describe their political adversaries. It is not clear whether the use of the term 'monster' here has any conscious connection with this earlier tradition of its use.

Finally, the passage quoted above from Gray's text is of interest because it attributes the objectionable nature of pro-Situ groups directly to the original S I. The writer emphasises this point by stating it three times ('their traits are undoubtedly linked', 'the S I is responsible for its monstrous offspring'; 'the S I's original sin" is tied up with'). The main characteristic of the S I which this writer refers to as creating its 'monstrous offspring' is the S I's 'sardonic

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<sup>3</sup> This notion of devotion has some overlap also with responses to some prominent anarchists such as Murray Bookchin, who tend to drop associations with people who state their minor differences with his viewpoint, as writer on anarchism David Goodway once remarked, to stay in with Murray you have to be a *believer* (personal communication, 1998)

megalomania of iconoclasm'. Gray has his own perspectives on the flaws in the S.I. which I want to discuss here

For Gray, there were two factors which contributed to the flaws in the Situationist project. First was their organisational methods, of expelling members after disagreement (1974 p.165), and second was their pursuit of the perfect intellectual formula, in which 'The S.I. thought you just had to show how the nightmare worked and everyone would wake up' (ibid p 166)

Gray sees this as leading to a hierarchical organisation based on intellectual ability 'and thus on disciples and followers, on fears and exhibitionism, the whole political horror trip' (ibid p 167)

Gray also sees this over-emphasis on the perfect *intellectual* formula as neglecting the *emotional* level, a point I return to later since it has some relevance for understanding the aficionado milieu.

There are some difficulties with the idea that the pro-Situ scene was a direct result of qualities in the S.I.. Firstly, Situationist texts and ideas have influenced individuals and projects in many ways: *Anti Clock-wise* (see Chapter 7) is an example of a project drawing on the Situationists for inspirational influence; there are many who do not directly participate in the more obsessively focused camps of aficionados but who nonetheless relate positively to the Situationists; for example, Carol, active in anarchist publishing, spoke of the 'uplifting' effect of Situationist texts (personal communication 1990).

### **The legacy of the Situationists and impact on the aficionado milieu**

There may however be something about the *virulence* and *intransigence* of the Situationists' uncompromising critique of the totality, and the boldness with which they deliver their perspectives, which may attract some individuals predisposed, in an emotional sense, to intransigence, who then amplify this 'negativity' in their own attitudes and interventions. While some approach Situationist texts as one source among many of a spectrum of oppositional ideas, others are more affected by the attitudes and the virulent style of writing. Adherents and critics alike have captured rather evocatively the Situationists' (and in particularly Debord's) brand of critical rhetoric. Tim Clark, for example, (ex-King Mob and now an art historian) writes of Debord's 'chiliastic serenity' (Clark 1990 in Ford 1995 p 8). Bonnet writes of the 'ridiculous pomposity of their constant pronouncements' and describes them as nurturing 'the image of the ultimate radicals' (1991 *Variant* 9 p 32). In 1968, *Le Monde* commented on the Situationists' 'snarling, extravagant rhetoric', more cynical in Vaneigem more icy in Debord (14.2.68 quoted in Knabb (ed) 1981 p.382).

The tenor of intransigence may have amplified any negative undercurrents in the different camps of the post/pro Situationist milieu. The intensity of focus, research and knowledge in these camps suggests the ardent devotee and cleric. Some emphasise that their aim is to

demystify the Situationists (eg R bertson 1988), or to debunk them from any status as gurus (eg. Home (ed) 1996), or to show their project

'as a product of the material conditions of its time, rather than some transcendental doctrine of revolution that emanated from the heads of privileged geniuses' (Unpopular Books, introduction to their edition of Barrot 1987)

These are positive aims, though the intensity with which they are sometimes approached in the milieu seems to arise partly from a desire to differentiate interventions from those of the pro-situ milieu.

Another aspect of the Situationist project is that their skill in writing lyrical rhetoric, as analysed in Chapter 4, may successfully convey the transformatory message to sympathetic readers, but it also raises the question as to how radical lyrical poetry can be lived and sustained in everyday life: hence the commonplace response by anarchists who see the importance of Situationist ideas but decide that 'you can't live like that'. The rhetoric does not offer a clear means of how to live out the critique in daily life, as is discussed in Chapter 3. Christopher Gray wrote:

'The S.I. became famous, and its truth stood out in all its bitterness. a brilliant theoretical critique of society without any grasp of the real problems of what to do about it...

...Their quest was for the perfect formula, the magic charm that would disperse the evil spell.'  
(Gray 1974 pp. 165 and 166)

An exchange in the post-Situationist zine *Anti Clock-wise* (see Chapter 7) articulates the tension and contradiction captured by Gray in the quote above, between the perfect formula and the problem of living it. The exchange occurs between Feral Faun, who argues for questioning social values, and Mathew, who takes up a critical perspective on the pure intransigence which is an aspect of the Situationist project. Mathew asks 'how someone who has destroyed all social values is supposed to get on with people they meet in the street, are they allowed to have mates?' He argues

'Claiming a pure intransigent relationship to society owes more to the tradition of avant garde art or the political vanguard in its despising of those who can't quite get round to destroying all those distastefully common social values.' (*Anti Clock-wise*) (see also Chapter 7).

The discussion of the charge of 1970s pro-Situationist groups as 'monsters', and how far it is attributable to the SI itself, is important in exploring the relationship to the past in radical currents, and how texts can influence projects. As the 'monstrous' pro-Situ groups were not generally acquaintances of the SI membership the influence, and any flavour of intransigence or megalomania, was communicated via texts. In my commitment to a relationship prioritizing I/Thou` in Buber`s sense (see Chapter 1), I do not wish to 'psychoanalyse' those about whom I am writing. What I present here is an excavation, drawing on evaluations by participants in independently published texts, of what it is about the Situationist project that arouses such intense responses from those who become interested in them.

## Emotional and psychological dimensions

When Barrot writes of the pro-Situ scene that 'they have nothing in common but *psychological* problems', his invective is relevant to many collaborations in modern Western culture, where the degree of emotional distress has been the subject of a wide literature: from the Freudo Marxist theories of Reich (1942, 1975) and Marcuse (1955-1964) to the humanistic existentialist therapeutic writings of R.D. Laing (1960, 1961) and to the contemporary writings of Alice Miller (1995) on the myriad forms of subtle abuse to which children are subject. Though Reich was influential in Situationist texts, particularly Vaneigem's, the English S.I. member Christopher Gray locates the central flaw in the Situationist project as their neglect of the emotional dimension:

'What was basically wrong with the S.I. was that it focused exclusively on an intellectual critique of society. There was no concern whatsoever with either the emotions or the body...

'...Ultimately the problem is an *emotional*, not an intellectual one. All the analyses of reification in the world won't cause a neurosis to budge an inch. Certainly a massive propaganda campaign to publicise the possibility of a revolution, of a total transformation of the world, is vitally important - but it will prove totally ineffective if it isn't simultaneous with *the creation of mass therapy*.' (Gray 1974 pp. 166 and 166)

Though this Reichian terminology of *mass* therapy sounds dated now, it nonetheless relates to the levels of unresolved distress which are an aspect of modern experience and which fuel the patterns and intransigence which most projects and associations, including radical oppositional ones, have their own share of. It is possible that patterns may be more evident in radical libertarian projects in which there is a conscious rejection of forms of leadership and hierarchy. I venture to suggest the idea that hierarchical relations in conventional institutions and groups may obscure distress patterns by 'keeping the lid' on them. A discussion in *Here and Now* (see Chapter 8) by Jim McFarlane highlights the separation between the alternative therapeutic movement and radical political milieux, McFarlane's argument implies that both could benefit from taking on board aspects of the other's project.

## The value of anthropology in providing a 'thicker' description of post-Situationist culture

The discussion above is essential in analysing the process and context of the uptake of Situationist ideas into anarchism, and the way in which different circles relate to the project and amongst themselves. It forms a historical and analytical account from which an ethnography emerges, one which allows some significant elements to be understood. These elements are, firstly, the oppositional impulse that is a primary motivation in the post/pro situationist milieu,

note, for example, the way in which the term 'milieu' is used to differentiate those whose primary concern is radical social transformation, from those whose interest in the SI derives from more professional, intellectual and academic concerns. Secondly, the discussion contributes to the important understanding of how the past, and a relationship to the past, is an essential aspect of the interventions of oppositional currents. And thirdly, the discussion highlights the role of *texts* as the material and symbolic artefacts which are another important aspect in the constitution of such currents. Texts form an essential tool in both the common focus on the Situationists in this milieu, and in their interventions around this project.

Nonetheless, the discussion above could benefit from a richer ethnographic account of lived experience, particularly to mitigate against the more antagonistic elements which emerge between various circles and also in response to the *virulence* of Situationist rhetoric, as analysed above. There is a disjuncture between the apparently aggressive rhetoric (though to adherents it is seen as playful as well as powerful) and the affable individuals behind many post- and pro-Situationist projects, which I have occasion to note in the chapters which follow. There have been occasions when I have heard about a person, before encountering them, from someone who is involved in a feud with them. From such accounts it was tempting to imagine this person as, indeed, a monster suffering from aggressive megalomania. My experience has been that the 'monstrous' person almost invariably turns out to be pleasant and well-mannered and the reverse of the objectionable character portrayed by their adversary.

The ethnographic descriptions which follow are offered to foreground more of the lived world of post-Situationist milieux and their elements of conviviality. The descriptions also counter the more negative perceptions of a milieu whose lived experience is richer than historical and analytical accounts would convey. I have organised the description around a set of events occurring mainly in the late 1980s to mid-1990s when my own social participation was most active.

### Art gallery collaborations

During the last half of the 1980s, some collaborations involving several individuals in the post-Situationist milieu formed around art exhibitions and events (Ruins of Glamour, Glamour of Ruins, Chisenhale Studios, London 1986; Desire in Ruins, Transmission Gallery, Glasgow 1987, the Festival of Plagiarism in London, 1987; Refuse in Sweden, 1988, Anon in Luton, 1989). These interventions testify to the aesthetic dimension of the Situationist project continuing to inform some interventions, particularly during this period. I want here to describe my experience of a visit to an installation which was part of the Festival of Plagiarism, organised by Ed Baxter, Graham Harwood and Stewart Home.

'Hoardings' was an exhibition of installations by Ed Baxter and Andrew Hopton, co-organisers of CounterProductions and Aporia Press and Simon Dickason, an architect, all had been

involved with Home and others in previous exhibitions (such as Ruins of Glamour... and Desire in Ruins). The exhibition was in Balham, south London. The gallery was fairly dark, with low lighting angled on the installations themselves, one of which consisted of fishing nets strung across a space, strewn with odd items and commodities including old used tea bags. Texts were included to clarify the intended critiques of commodity capitalism and its impact on everyday life, and Western capitalist exploitation of third world countries with reference especially to tea as a commodity. The installation was effective in suspending ordinary reality in the gallery space, and casting critical reflection on everyday life.

Simon Dickason, one of the installers of the exhibition, was in the gallery when I visited, and greeted and conversed cordially with me and my family who had accompanied me. During my visit, a visiting dealer who was evidently impressed with the installations informed Dickason that he would like to buy them, and asked for a price. Dickason followed the principles of anti-art and the rejection of commodities and the market by refusing to sell the work, saying he would instead offer to give the dealer a shopping list of the items used in the work.

This brief account highlights cordial social relations combined with an example of political perspectives put into practice: in the refusal of Dickason to sell the installation, to adhere to the principles of anti-commodification and anti-art, which was the ethos of the Festival of Plagiarism of which the exhibition was a part. I mentioned to Stewart Home, another Festival of Plagiarism organiser, that Dickason and Baxter's had refused to gain commercially from their project by selling it to the dealer as an art market commodity. Home was impressed but added that he thought he would probably be happy to sell one of his installations to a dealer for commercial gain, especially as at the time he needed the money!

### **Launches at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London**

Book launches and conferences provide occasions for networks to gather, and points of contact. There were several launches and conferences relating to Situationist and post-Situationist phenomena at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in London between 1988, the year of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of May 68 and of an exhibition of Situationist work there, and the early 1990s. The exhibition itself opened with a launch to which some of those in post Situationist circles were invited, and some invited themselves. I heard from one guest that Stewart Home was frequently seen near people like Malcolm McLaren who occupied a position of celebrity status.

Other events included a conference about the Situationists which involved a panel of speakers and a large audience in the theatre. The audience included many Situationist adherents, including a middle-aged Dutch man with a pony tail, who had some association with the Situationists. The man, who was very vocal in the discussion, made a point during the interval of going up to the table where the panel of speakers had sat and helping himself to a bottle of

mineral water - a statement which expressed his critique of hierarchy and the separation of audience from the panel.

Another event at the ICA was a launch of an anthology ( Carlsson (ed) 1990) of the US post-Situationist magazine *Processed World* (see above and Chapter 2) in 1990. Several of those involved in the magazine, mainly from San Francisco, read out excerpts from the platform to the theatre audience, with whom they mingled and conversed afterwards in the bar area. People in attendance included some from *Here and Now* magazine (see Chapter 8), Stewart Home, Peter Kravitz of *Edinburgh Review*, (and myself). I noticed that one member of Leeds *Here and Now* put his criticism of *Processed World* as a project to one of its editors.

The event, which had been relayed around the network of post-Situationists, was duly attended, and forms an example of social interaction in the public sphere, and an intersection with the mainstream, via the launch at the ICA as a public institution supported by Arts Council (ie. state) funding.

Occasional talks on Situationist or related phenomena at mainstream institutions such as the ICA form opportunities for those in post-Situationist milieux to meet up, as do launches of texts which may be held at venues ranging from Camden Town bars to bookshops to arts centres. This further highlights the role of texts and social occasions around their publication as enablers of a social network focussed round texts and a common project of social transformation.

## Conclusions

This chapter presents an account of post-Situationist milieux, and highlights the different camps within the circles of aficionados of the Situationist project: from the 'pro-Situs' whose desire is to publish and promote the ideas of the Situationists, to the 'critical clerics' who combine an intense fascination with the Situationists with a desire to debunk their mythical status. In some cases, as with Stewart Home's relationship to the Situationist project, the desire to demystify their ideas and demolish their role as gurus, leads to an attack on their work, and feuds with pro-Situs (see also Chapter 9)

From accounts of the early 'pro-Situ' scene in the USA in the 1970s, a negative image of this milieu emerged, and some commentators have contributed to characterising this milieu as 'monstrous'. The writing of such commentators is considered to explore to what extent the charges of 'monsters' and 'megalomania' are in any way directly attributable to the original Situationist project

The incorporation of the Situationists into anarchism is explored, as is the fate of the aesthetic dimensions of the project, with which there is some continuity in the art installations, in the late 1980s, in which several 'post-Situationists' participated. An account of these art exhibitions is included, together with descriptions of conferences and book launches, for a richer ethnographic dimension

This chapter excavates different layers of what is, for some in the pro- or post-Situationist milieu in the UK, an obsessive focus on the Situationists. Hussey, who wrote a biography of Debord, found that his fascination only grew when he found himself to be the target of angry accusations about his writing on Debord and a conference Hussey organised on Debord and the SI in 1994 in Manchester. Hussey asked, 'What was it about this man which incited people to such extremes of emotion?' (Hussey 2001 p 3). Though the remark is made in the context of French responses to his treatment of Debord, it nonetheless confirms the strong emotions that Debord and the Situationists arouse in those who become interested in their project.



## Chapter 7

### Anti Clock-wise to Away With All Cars

When issue 1 of the 'rantzine' *Anti Clock-wise* appeared in 1989, the slogans on the cover revealed its Situationist influence to anyone familiar with their ideas. alongside a large image of a man's watch from an advertisement were the words

ANTI CLOCK-WISE

Nihilists, one more effort if we are to be revolutionaries!

TIME IS THE ENEMY, PLEASURE IS THE AIM!

*Anti Clock-wise (ACW)*, a periodical cheaply and informally produced in the form of a stapled photocopied 'zine', was the project of 'The Museum of Modern Alienation' and of one person, Rick Turner, who was at that time working as a librarian in Liverpool. *ACW* ran for 20 issues until 1992 (when Rick began another series entitled *No*, until 1994).<sup>1</sup>

Turner's zines were characterised by his regular rants and responses from reader-contributors, alongside a lavish use of visual images, taken from mainstream newspapers and magazines and subject to the Situationist art of 'detournement' - taken out of context and with the meaning subverted. Turner referred to *ACW* as aiming to be a

'sounding board for those people who are opposing the 1990's society of competitive, materialist selfishness based on, and...reliant on, consumerism - ie a fetish for commodities...be it designer drugs, art, cars, environmentally friendly products or the latest in electrical goods' (from a rant in issue 4).

The tone and imagery of the zines adopt a playful use of humour and ridicule, and his use of such tools as a conscious one is revealed when for example he calls others to be 'imaginative, original and devastating .to have a laugh and enjoy opposition Ridicule is our greatest weapon because we live in a ridiculous world.' (issue 4)

He argues for a society where

'trust, love and friendship are predominant values and materialist consumer ideologies are relegated to history books, along with religion, politics, sacrifice and national states' (ibid)

This explicit call to love, friendship and mutual solidarity, also found in the writings of Situationist Vaneigem, appears to inform the tone of Turner's rantzines, which are characterised by a friendly personal style of writing, communicated very directly to the reader in the conversational words of a one oppositionalist to another, by which the text becomes the medium

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'zine' refers to an independently produced magazine by and for fans of a topic - initially science fiction in the USA in the 1930s but popularised particularly during the 1970s and 1980s with zines by and for fans of popular culture such as punk music and football. The term 'rantzine' appears in an anthology of *ACW* (Black Economy Books 1995) and fuses the word zine with that of rant. Rants, which have an honourable tradition in oppositional currents from the 17th century Ranters such as Abiezer Coppe, were a regular feature of Turner's zines.

# ANTI CLOCK — WISE.

hilists, one more effort if  
e are to be revolutionaries!



"Commodity Fetishism & the Dominant  
Culture are draining my will to live...."

IE MAGAZINE THAT DOESN'T KNOW  
HERE IT'S GOING AND DOESN'T  
EALLY CARE .....



Anti Clock-wise 4 p.2: note the use of an early 1960s Cliff Richard film promotion photograph (suitably detoured with a humorous cartoon bubble), and the use of the logos of large corporations alongside the oppositional rhetoric, containing critique of traditional politics (no demonstrations to go on) and Trotskyist style recruitment tactics (no party to join, no papers to flog). Note too the photocopied style and use of manual typewriter.

The critique is what this magazine aims to develop and invites you to contribute. There is no party to join, no demonstrations to go on, no papers to flog on street corners, tho' help with distribution is very welcome !) no lain down answers to all the world's problems. The circulation of this mag is miniscule, but if what it is saying is of some use or as validity to those people fighting back now then hopefully at least the ideas may be disseminated in whatever ways that are available via other media.

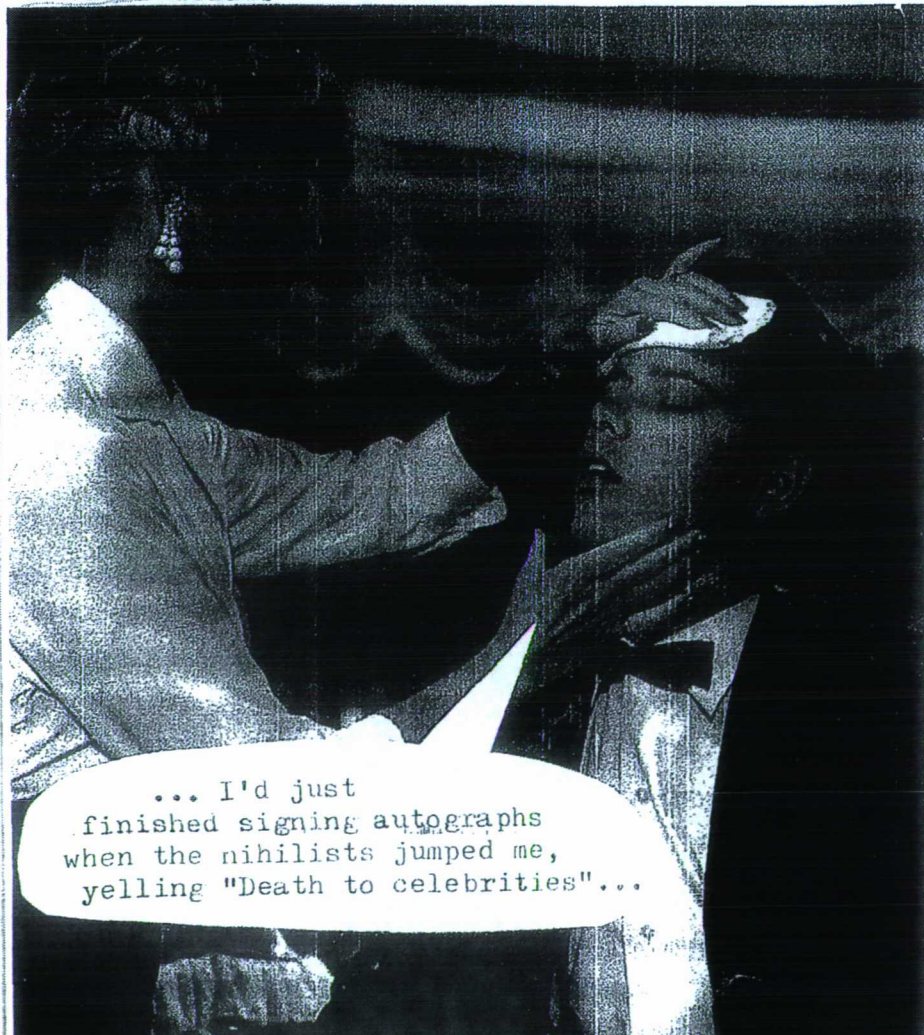


Sometimes, everything seems hopeless, the odds insurmountable, but knowing there are others is inspiring, solidarity is indeed strength as long as individuality is not swamped by popularist cloning and stereotyping. Alienation is one of power's greatest weapons if we are all divided over religion, politics, dress, food, soap opera preference, washing powder etc. then we cannot be hassling those in power. Tolerate each other, be intolerant of patriarchal authority and exploitation.

Wall's

The tactics are up to you. I believe that there is a place for pacifism and a place for direct action against the property of capitalists. You may say this is vague, but the specifics are up to those willing to fight back. Ideally, developed counter culture (a horrid and dated phrase, but will do here) has to be created, with ordinary militant people prepared to take on those who bring toxic waste into their communities, to take on the police who kill and hassle their friends, to give support to those being exploited and

oppressed, and most of all to be imaginative, original and devastating in doing it - to have a laugh and enjoy opposition. Ridicule is our greatest weapon because we live in a ridiculous world.



Anti Clock Wise is a project of Museum of Modern Alienation and can be contacted c/o Rick, P.O.Box 1169 6AU, Liverpool, Merseyside. Send correspondence, criticisms or contributions as it breaks the isolation.

Back issues of Anti Clock Wise are available, but in very small amounts.

\*1 "Time is the enemy, Pleasure is the aim" - Time to clock off ; What I won't volunteer to pick coffee for free in Nicaragua ; Names as keys to our identity ; Nihilism ; Advertising.

\*2 "Those who carry out their revolutions by halves... Dig their own graves" - Isolation ; Hillsborough Billy Graham poster ; Glass in our society ; The gospel according to A.C.W.

\*3 Anti-Art issue - Dada ; Mail Art ; S.I. Exhibition ; state of art.

Each 40p & S.A.E. or £1.20 inc. p.p. the £1.20 also gets you the next 3 issues by mail.



# Inspirational



## CLASS WAR



There aren't too many political organisations that I have a soft spot for, or can even tolerate for that matter. Class War is probably one of them. In the mid 1980s I was out flogging papers and harassing right and left wing demos for Class War. Class War is, and always has been, easy to criticise. The usual patronising attitude is that it is an extraordinarily naive bunch of knee jerk reactionaries who only differ from other left wing groups in the level of their extremism. It is the only realistic left wing group for anarchic alienated young rebels if they feel the need to affiliate to something (as I did when I first stumbled on the anarchist movement).

I was attracted to the group because it confronted the rich and exploiters, which no other left wing group seemed to be doing, and was not afraid to physically confront its enemies. Not content with expressing support for the miners, it went out and joined them on the picket lines - without a bundle of papers. In its early days it really was different - Bash the Rich marches, attacks on the rich at Henley, hijacking CND rallies from the sheep like pacifist middle classes, Stop the City - although, as many people have pointed out, it was really part of a radical tradition. Most of its campaigns either fizzled out on the



THE TIMES 29.6.92

Rick Turner's second series of zines, *No*, showing Turner's desire to capture the best of other strands of anarchist currents, as well as differentiating his own position.

University challenge: activists from the far-left group Class War confronting Oxford students at their Shelley Ball at the weekend. Police broke up disturbances and made 27 arrests. Full story page 1



offering a sense of community and 'camraderie'<sup>2</sup>. This was possibly an important element in helping create the response to the zines, which drew an international circle of correspondence whose enthusiasm brought contributions and debates to the project. Turner received 1240 pieces of mail during the three-year period in which *ACW* was produced (Black Economy Books 1995 p 2). This illustrates the capacity of the periodical to act as a means of creating contact and community with the aid of the postal system

Though the number produced for each issue of Turner's zines varied from 150 to 200, the circulation exceeded this as many readers photocopied their own copy (ibid p.2) Around 100 were distributed via radical bookshops, and the rest were sent to people who got in touch.

Turner described his initial involvement in the project of *ACW* as starting for his own enjoyment and amusement ('as a bit of a laugh', personal letter May 1990), to 'wind people up and get in touch with like-minded people', and as a way of meeting and contacting people ('The importance is the contact and shared experience' ibid). This illustrates one of the themes explored in this thesis - the capacity of texts as artefacts to enable contact and a sense of community.

Once Turner had produced the first issue of *ACW*, he followed up a suggestion from a friend that he photocopy it and leave it in 'lefty shops'. He went on to produce an issue every two months for several years.

### **Biography, class consciousness, encounter with radical ideas, and influences**

Turner's zines come across with all the virulence of Situationist slogans, as the one carried on the front page, 'Nihilists, one more effort if we are to be revolutionaries'. This contrasts with another slogan, more characteristic of his more conversational style, which appears on some issues as 'The paper that doesn't know where it's going and, frankly, doesn't care'. This metamorphosed with a humorous touch, into, 'The paper which still doesn't know where it's going but is beginning to care a bit'. In the case of Turner, as with others discussed in later chapters (including Home, Vague and the editor of *Anarchy*), there is a mismatch between the hard rhetoric, which can give the impression of the person behind it as possibly aggressive, and the amiable, friendly personality of those behind the rhetoric. In my encounters with Turner, I found him to be open, friendly and sociable. He referred to his own good-natured character when he joked to me (meeting, 1990) that whenever he joined friends on anti-fascist demonstrations and was approached by the police, he was always immediately let off. In his view, it was his qualities as 'Mummy's boy' that gave him this advantage (the expression 'Mummy's boy' denoting a young man who is friendly and unthreatening because he is still under his mother's influence)

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<sup>2</sup> The tone is in contrast to the more critical (ironic and at times sarcastic) tone of, for example Stewart Home (see Chapter 9) and the humour of Turner's zines is missing in most 'pro-Situ' texts

A closer reading of Turner's zines, as already indicated, reveals the personable aspect of his communications. In his writing and rants he at times refers directly to his own personal experience. For example in *No* (issue 10), he includes an account of his experience of working as a librarian, in response to a few people in search of a job who had asked him this question. He describes librarianship as 'probably the only job I could ever tolerate and derive a modicum of pleasure from'; along with the low pay, he writes, is a low stress level. He details his own work history, starting as a library assistant at Liverpool University's arts library, working in a housing association library, and, by the last issue of *No* in 1994, working in Manchester Medical School library.

When I contacted Turner again in 1999, he was working as a librarian in a grammar school and studying for an MA in librarianship. As indicated in Chapter 2, books are artefacts which many anarchists find offer a convivial basis for work.

Turner was first introduced to anarchism when he was a history student at Liverpool University, where anarchism 'was being hawked by trendy rebel students having a rad time away from the folks' (personal letter 1990). He describes this as a lucky event, since the ideas resonated with his own experience of class oppression. His father had worked all his life at a Walls meat plant, and was given nothing when he had to stop work because of ill health following a brain haemorrhage. Turner's introduction to anarchism allowed him to become aware that he was working class 'and that, as a class we were still being oppressed in various ways, even in the 1980s' (ibid)

His father's ill health and unemployment coincided with Turner's student years at Liverpool University. His class consciousness was also raised by his experience of being at university. As he wrote:

'I was just a kid off an estate in Stockport, my dad was unemployed after working all his life at Walls meat, he had a brain haemorrhage and the company gave him nowt when he had to leave because of ill health. I went to university when all this was going on, I was well out of my depth but people pretended to be poor and right-on for 3 years and I didn't see through it - though I was always under the impression that I was inadequate and never took anyone to my parents' home, apart from a few girlfriends. I did OK and got a degree, all my college friends are now whizkids in London. Luckily university introduced to me Anarchism, which was being hawked by trendy rebel students having a rad time away from the folks - but I also met some good people and some ideas that made sense, and I started to become aware that I was working class and that, as a class we were still being oppressed in various ways, even in the 1980s.' (ibid)

In the last issue of his second series of zines, *No* Turner gives a further account of how his interest in anarchist and radical ideas developed. The occasion for this is an article he writes in support of an uprising by the Mexican peasant movement, the Zapatistas. This forms another illustration of Turner's reference to his own lived experience in his writings in the zines. Here he cites his initial awareness as arising at school as well as college, where he

'became enthralled by the snippets of rebellion that occasionally were allowed to surface from the anglicised imperialistic history we were taught' (*No issue* 10 1994)

His interest was captured by examples of resistance such as the Gordon riots, the Luddites, and by revolutionaries such as Kropotkin, Bakunin and Che Guevara. (*ibid*)

He points to the 'strange fate in my history' in the irony of reading Errico Malatesta's *Anarchy* as a set text when he was an 18 year old student, on a full grant because his father's wage was low, and yet where 'most of the others on my course were children of the military or ruling class'. (*ibid*)

Turner's initial involvement with anarchist projects was while he was a student. He writes. 'In 1984 I came across Class War and knew local anarchists in Liverpool. In 1987, I was one of the founders of the Liverpool Anarchist Group (Mark 20, there was a strong tradition of anarchism in Liverpool). For 2 years the group gained quite a bit of notoriety by turning up at Royal visits, forcing nazis off the streets, producing some great graffiti etc. However, the group split and now there are about 12 people, who are little more than a left-wing splinter group, very Direct Action Movement influenced.

'I still join them on demos, but hang around with the lifestyle sort of anarchists these days, largely because they are more tolerant, if a bit drippy and lacking class awareness - e.g. animal rights people. The straight anarchists are bordering on the self-righteous, being intolerant of any ideas that stray from the norm, but they are O.k. and I am happy to work with them on particular things e.g. anti-fascist demos.' (letter 1990) <sup>3</sup>

Turner counts among his main influences Marx, anarchism and the Situationists. He does not call himself an anarchist, and, while producing *ACW*, preferred to characterise himself as a 'nihilist'; a debate about the meanings and usefulness of the term ran over several issues of the zine, and is summarised below. While defending in print the appeal of the term 'nihilist', Turner set out his differences with anarchism and its various forms. He cites his flirtation with anarchism as resulting in the realisation that all politics, however ultra-left, 'plays into the hands of a huge spectacular game'. He characterises the anarchist movement as consisting mainly of, on the one hand, 'po-faced class struggle anarchists' who are 'little more than another lefty marginal group hopelessly devoid of spirit, creativity and new ideas'; and, on the other hand, 'green lifestyle anarchists', who reject traditional political roles, but fall into the trap of single issue concerns and a 'drippy search for personal nirvana conducted with a disgusting middle class liberalism' (*ACW* 15)

In terms of his own lifestyle, Turner chooses work as a librarian rather than living on the dole, and wrote about his reasons for this

'I would not go on the dole because of the hassle these days, the money is shit and I'm unclear whether relying on the state is a good start for opposition to the state. However, I appreciate that

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<sup>3</sup> Lifestyle anarchists, referred to by Turner, are those with little interest in theory or class analysis but who tend to live out an anti-mainstream anarchistic lifestyle

most @s anarchists] prefer to be on the dole, rather than be wage slaves - my opinion is just personal, not dogma.'

While producing his zines, Turner shared rented accommodation with lifestyle anarchists. In the last issue of *No*, Turner wrote about his decision to buy a house with a garden in Stockport where he was brought up. He writes of finding it a tough decision to make politically ('after all, property is theft, isn't it?'), and explains that he took the decision because he was 'sick of paying rent to some parasite who has made a lot of money out of me', and because he believes in the need to move away from dependence on local or central government. He writes of looking forward to turning the garden into a vegetable patch (a common interest of many others in the anarchist movement who find pleasure and a sense of autonomy on a local allotment or vegetable garden) and writes

'In a world where everyday life is what someone else creates for me, I now wish to take as much responsibility as I can for the running of my own life. (*No* 10 1994)<sup>4</sup>

Turner's biography indicates how the personal experience of oppression, in his case class oppression, and a knowledge of history, can act as a factor in determining an individual receptiveness to radical ideas. His involvement in the Liverpool Anarchist Group which he helped found, and his familiarity with both class struggle and lifestyle anarchists, was also instrumental in his becoming disillusioned with anarchist groups, and seeking other inspirations to underpin his position and actions, such as Situationist notions of play, ridicule and cultural assault. Black Economy Books emphasise Turner's zine *ACW* as 'Born out of a frustration at the mentality currently dominating the anarchist movement' (1995 p.1). This disillusionment, resulting in a project more post-Situationist than anarchist, is paralleled in the emergence of *Here and Now*, which began out of a frustration with the anarchist mentality encountered via the group Clydeside Anarchists in Glasgow. *Anarchy*, the US periodical, also emerged from a group of anarchists, the Columbia Anarchist League.

### Situationist influences and the use of the past

Turner sees his activities as being part of a strand of radical counter culture' running through the 20th century and embracing avant garde currents and the Situationists (letter 1990). Elsewhere he refers to those to whom he feels connected as 'autonomist anarchists', differentiating them from the traditional left and from mainstream, class struggle and lifestyle anarchists (see above) (*No* 10). The slogan on the front cover of *ACW* - 'Nihilists, one more effort if we are to be

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<sup>4</sup> Two examples of the allotment as site of anarchist autonomy are: One *Here and Now* writer spoke of his own engagement with a transformation of everyday life through his work on his allotment (personal communication 1994). An anarchist, Eliot spoke of his allotment-grown produce as offering the creation of social and exchange relationships outside of the capitalist/monetary commodity system: 'if he had a surplus of vegetables, he was happy to offer them to a passerby, friend or neighbour - an act that only made sense in terms of self-produced goods that is he would not give money away to a passer-by' (Anarchist Research Group discussion, April 1999).



revolutionaries' - is recognisable to potential readers versed in Situationist rhetoric to signify a familiarity with their project<sup>5</sup>

Turner's zines were labelled Situationist by straight anarchist groups such as Black Flag, and by some in post-Situationist milieu such as in *Here and Now*, who, Turner writes, 'should perhaps be more perceptive' (letter 1990). This indicates that he saw the influences on his project as more wide-ranging. Turner's characterisations of his project however are distinctly Situationist. He writes of the importance of pleasure, play and humour as part of the revolution of everyday life and critique of the spectacle, in the here and now. The Situationist terminology and inspiration is explicit, and draws on well-known critiques by the Situationists, such as that of the militant and the sacrifice to the 'cause', the party (this Situationist critique of the militant and of sacrifice is also drawn on by anti-capitalist currents; see Chapter 12). Turner writes, 'I believe that we should continue to criticise all aspects of everyday life and expose their absurdity...Every chink in the armour of the spectacle, from the perversity of those in power to the availability of access to global information, must be seized on...This should be done for our own pleasure and satisfaction, not out of sacrifice to the "cause".' (No 10).

Turner was drawn at this time to the notions of 'nihilism' (see the debate below) and 'cultural terrorism' (ibid) as categories which resonated with his own sense of his interventions. He advocates 'a bad attitude, cynicism and ridicule' and a 'nihilistic assault on everyday life, both politically and culturally' (ACW 15), and 'Originality, spontaneity and humour [which] are not the characteristics of the traditional left, but autonomist anarchists have these talents in abundance.' No 10)

All these characterisations, nonetheless, are compatible with those advocated by the Situationists (though the humour of the latter is rather more virulent and sardonic than that of Turner). The contrast between the two projects lies in Turner's use of a personal conversational style of writing, though he does not explicitly conceptualise this as one of his tools of oppositional intervention.

In keeping with Situationist critique of the totality, everyday life and commodity culture, Turner's rants target the elements of contemporary life which are taken for granted by those co-opted into dominant culture. The zines expose the most familiar elements of modern existence - time, holidays, sex, cars, religion, architecture - to critical invective.

An overlap with *Here and Now* (see following chapter) lies in the rejection of received notions of 'political correctness' in developing critical views. In his rants, Turner included his own critical perspectives, and he alluded to his awareness that his views are controversial, even in the milieu of which he was a part, with asides such as 'I, rather controversially I suppose believe'. (No 10). Black Economy Books write

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Like some other well-known Situationist slogans such as 'Humanity will not be happy until the slogan 'Nihilists' derives from earlier radical traditions and is attributed by Vaneigem to de Sade

## WHY I'M BUYING A HOUSE

I am currently in the process of buying a house. It will cost £10,000, although that includes all the furniture, gardens to the front and rear, a garage, a potting shed, double glazing and central heating. I'm quite looking forward to it. However, ethically it was a tough decision to make - after all, property theft, isn't it?

Well, the main reason for moving into the ownership sector is that I am sick of paying rent to landlords and getting nothing in return. I have rented, mostly in the private rented sector, for the last ten years and have paid an average of £40 a week (probably more) in rent to some parasite who has made a lot of money out of me. £40 per week works out at £20,000 over the ten years. Money down the drain, usually blocked drains too. Most of the places have been real dives, over which I have had little or no control.

At least now I will have some control over my immediate environment in which I can sculpt the surroundings into something I feel comfortable living in. Home is the key word. Shelter is a basic requisite for life and it is imperative, for me at least, to have as much say as possible in that shelter. It's rather like squatting. In a world where everyday life is what someone else creates for me, I now wish to take as much responsibility as I can for the running of my own life.

I cannot wait to move in and dig up the back garden to turn it into a vegetable patch. I will finally have room to breathe in a community where I was brought up and where the rented sector is almost non-existent. This is important to me.

I realise that private ownership is not the answer to the housing crisis. There is a role for social housing, although council housing seems to be on its way out to be replaced by housing associations. But housing associations are increasingly coming under fire for creating the same sort of problems that council housing was criticised for or end up spending massively expensive new build schemes because renovation is apparently dearer. Housing association rents are often more expensive than local authorities too.

I, rather controversially I suppose, believe that we need to move away from over dependence on local, central and quango government. The housing problem could be eased if all the thousands of long term voids were seized - although this is being made more difficult by legislation against squatters.

So, while I am working, I intend to seize a bit of control over my life. Sorry if you object to that, but it is important for everyone to have their own space and this will be mine.

**TURN YOUR CASH  
INTO UNWANTED  
HOUSEHOLD  
ITEMS !!**



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YIPPEE! ANOTHER A.C W NONSENSICAL RANT.

Like all revolutionaries stranded in a present without a revolution, the anarchists continually look back. There is never forever, only the moment. The present is everything because the future is an irrelevant abstract that only becomes the present when it is reached

A personal revolution of everyday life is the most audacious act that a 1990s human can carry out. There is little point in sacrificing our lives, our one life or 'existence', for some maybe of the future, when we will probably be dead. How will we ever know if we have succeeded. Surely it is better to fail now than to never know the outcome (Better to have loved and lost etc.!).

By pushing at the glass barriers, both physical and psychological, that divide us from each other, maybe ... just maybe ... there is a better world of real experience beyond. And it is surely better to risk society's ultimate punishment, of humiliation, in a search for understanding, love and maybe even peace in this glorious new age of imperialism

The left and right extremes make the classic error of challenging a society that they know is sadly wrong, as do all people being exploited, on it's own terms, that is via politics.

The well worn "All politicians are liars" is true of anyone who dabbles in a political solution to a blasé, selfish, materialistic, commodity fetishist society that has been moulded with the tool of politics. It is putting out fire with petrol.

What is required is a critical, cynical and radical analysis of this political wing of Capital, not the individual specifics, but the totality of politics itself. This has to be done in tandem with an assault



'Anti Clock-wise differed from the usual anarchist magazines by attacking everything without regard for political correctness ..it was a one person critique of everything and anything...it was anti-political Politics and anti-art Art.' (1995 pp. 2 and 1)

### **Visual images, graphics, detournement**

In Situationist tradition, Turner zines use visual images often subjected to 'detournement' - subverting the image and/ or text to change or ridicule the original meaning and hijack its message. The images used are often common everyday ones drawn from newspapers. Some examples are included below

Despite his skill at using visual images to effect, Rick maintained an anti-art perspective and asserted that he had little interest in art. An illustration of the way in which he differentiated himself from 'art' milieux and practices was his reaction at a launch (of a small press imprint) involving performance art shows, which, Turner joked, were 'way over [his] head', suggesting that he did not feel part of the milieu in which such interventions as 'performance art' were a part (launch of Working Press, Conway Hall, 1990).

His critique of art extended to literary forms such as poetry, which he professed to disliking even though he had been writing it since 1977. He explained his dislike of poetry because of its status as an art form

'marketed as entertainment entailing profit and "genius pedestal" as opposed to expression for the sake of it or a communication with some form of hope' (ACW 4)

Before including some examples of Turner's use of graphics and detournement, it is worth mentioning the anti-aesthetic at work in the production of the zines, which are a prime example of what *Bypass Zine* called 'crap-xerox-chic' - photocopies of manually typewritten texts, letraset (transfer letters) headings and cut-out images, stapled together. The primary consideration in this was limiting the cost of production, but it also contributes to the zines as informal communications, offering camaraderie through the commitment to amateur production and the do-it-yourself ethic. Black Economy Books, writing in 1995, not long after the last issue of *No*, saw this do-it-yourself 'punk effort at a publication' as unlikely to be taken seriously a few years down the line. Whether or not this is accurate is not easily ascertained, since there are no comparable efforts now but certainly the impact of computers and desk top publishing has replaced more mechanically produced efforts, even though 'crap-xerox-chic' is still in evidence in the anarchist milieu in the form of flyers etc

### *Examples of visual images and detournement*

*No* issue 10. This includes a detourned local paper advertisement 'Turn your unwanted household items into cash' The advertisement with its cheaply produced sketches of five pound

notes and coins alongside household items (from ironing boards to televisions to prams) is shown with the caption switched to 'Turn your cash into unwanted household items'

*Anti Clock-wise* issue 12. This includes a comic strip from a teenage girls' magazine showing two young women with heavy make-up. One says "'Look Cindy, men competing with each other aggressively'" and the other replies "'Yes, and at an international level'". This subverts the original form of a comic strip involving glamorised versions of young women talking about men. The message is altered to make a critique of multinational businesses and governments, and the comic strip device increases the ridicule factor.

On the same page, a drawing of soldiers bearing a flag has been altered so that the flag shows the McDonalds fast food chain logo, also bringing a critique of multinational power and the role of economic interests in wars between states.

A slogan cut out from a newspaper advertisement reads "'My Rolex is more than just a watch, it makes me feel dressed'". This is juxtaposed alongside the critical rhetoric of a rant exposing the 'attractive deceit' of televisions, package holidays, cars and the 'cultural seduction of aspects of everyday life'. By juxtaposition, the Rolex advertising slogan then takes on two subverted meanings: it exemplifies and therefore supports the rant about 'cultural seduction' and 'attractive deceit'; and its message appears ridiculous.<sup>6</sup>

Turner's zines show a creative use of everyday media and advertising images to critical purpose. There is a tradition in anarchism of anti-copyright, and small often humorous line drawings, captions and cartoons are often copied freely from one paper or pamphlet to another. Those producing texts often complain that they would like a bigger supply and production of suitable illustrations to plagiarise or copy.<sup>7</sup>

### **A debate on nihilism**

To convey more of the flavour of *ACW*, and allow a sense of the periodical as a mediator of community between readers to emerge, a debate on nihilism is summarised below. The discussion, running over several issues, was sparked by Turner's use of the 'Nihilists, one more effort if we are to be revolutionaries' slogan on the cover of the zine. The slogan derives from

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Such commodity items loaded with connotations of wealth and power play a role in anti-capitalist demonstrations. For example, in the events of June 18 in the city of London, one participant observed a city worker taunting demonstrators from the window of his office, pointing to his Rolex watch to proclaim his success and wealth. Similarly, the cars targeted during demonstrations tend to be those which bespeak wealth and status (eg Porsches in the Anti Poll tax riot, a Jaguar on May Day 2001 in London). Another example was the trashing of shop fronts such as the nightclub Stringfellows in London which was the haunt of 'sleazy' celebrities, forms a symbol of consumerism and the spectacle.

For example, Bulletin of Anarchist Research, the Direct Action magazine and C.G.H. Services, a publishing imprint which printed *Anti Mas*, all included requests for sources of visual images, which they found to be in short supply. Turner appears not to have been hampered by the lack of suitable ready-made images, finding his own from everyday images and captions humorously detoured.

Vaneigem (1983 p 139), though it appears to be a variation of a proclamation of de Sade's, since Vaneigem writes '*Nihilists*, as de Sade would have said, *one more effort if you want to be revolutionaries*' (ibid).

As discussed above, Turner preferred the term 'nihilist' to 'anarchist' in order to differentiate himself from the spectacular game of politics. He saw all politics, however ultra left or anarchist, as playing into the hands of this spectacular game, and as acting merely as 'a safety valve to focus our justified anger on an agenda of single issues. Also politics is so goddam serious...' (ACW 15)

The term 'nihilism', then, was suited to many of his perspectives his rejection of orthodox politics whether anarchist or leftist; his rejection of a stance derived from a single theoretical or political perspective (he argued for taking the best of Marx, anarchism and the Situationists (letter 1990)); and his rejection of revolutionary role models - set identities or caricatures of what is its to be 'revolutionary' (a critique made by Vaneigem, see also Chapter 12). Turner writes,

'There can be no more nihilists fitting into role models created by society - the "artist", the eccentric, the apathetic youth, the suicide, the mass murderer, the recluse etc ' (ACW 1).

The term nihilism appeared in several issues of ACW in addition to the debate: a section on nihilism from Vaneigem's *Revolution of Everyday Life* in ACW 1, and a piece on nihilism from Christopher Gray's *Leaving the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* in issue 7; definitions from several dictionaries; and a short passage from Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons* (1861), in which the dialogue offers various definitions of a nihilist in 19th century Russia (Turgenev is cited by dictionaries as popularising the term, though one definition cites its origins as in the Middle Ages, when it was applied to certain heretics (ACW 8).

The debate moves from an excavation of the historical roots and meanings of the term 'nihilism', to an evaluation of its use in denoting and developing oppositional practice. The summary adopts as far as possible the original style of each writer, in order to convey the conversational element of each communication.

### **Nihilism: highlights of the ACW debate**

#### **ACW 15**

Letter from 'Elliot Cantsin' in the USA to Turner

Kropotkin's autobiography *The Prince* has a positive description of Russian nihilism, and it really just meant Bohemian. The nihilists hated Russian aristocratic society, just as I and many other contemporary alternative culture anarchists hate everything about commercial capitalist class society. But they didn't hate EVERYTHING, they had values, they were aesthetes revolutionary artists

Nihilism was given a rather negative association by Turgenev in his novel *Fathers and Sons*. Turgenev was a classist aristocrat and, seeing the nihilists negate everything that HE held dear, he took them at their word as being nihilists who negated everything and believed in nothing.

In 'Tinselland' (the USA), the term nihilism is used by right wing commercialists in the underground to mock us leftists who are foolishly idealistic enough to believe in *something*.

(To Turner) But I see you are the right kind of nihilist ..

Turner's response, same issue

I call myself a nihilist because I have lost faith in the anarchist movement. I now realise, after my naive flirtation with anarchism, that all politics plays into the hands of a huge spectacular game, a safety valve to focus our justified anger. I now make up my own mind about my perspectives. We need to use a bad attitude, cynicism, ridicule and a nihilistic assault on everyday life, both politically and culturally.

I'm not quite sure what the one more effort is for nihilists to become revolutionaries, but it is fun finding out and meeting new people doing the same thing.

## ACW 16

Heading: OH NO, A RANT AGAINST NIHILISM.

Paul of Reading.

The term nihilism is problematic in that it is against all ideology and all politics and stands for only being against the system, providing no positive alternative. The Situationists' use of the slogan 'Nihilists, one more effort if we are to become revolutionaries', refers to a critique of nihilists.

## ACW 18

Feral Faun, USA (see also Chapters 10 for Feral Faun's contributions in *Anarchy*):

Feral Faun writes: Paul's argument was dualistic - opposing ideology and anti-ideology, and political and anti-political. A third option would be that of being actively anti-political, of choosing to actively seek the destruction of the *polis* itself. Paul refers to 'changing' the capitalist system. I refer to 'destroying it' and to do so involves an analysis of the relationship between capitalism, authority and organisation.

While the Situationists used the slogan 'One more effort, nihilists ..' in the context of a critique of nihilism, their full context reveals that the Situationists mentioned active nihilism - the active questioning of every social value as an essential part of being revolutionary, though not adequate on its own. The Situationists saw this questioning as needing to lead to a reversal of perspective, in which the individual, having rejected society's perspective, is able to see what surrounds them from their own radical subjectivity, from their own passions and desires.

For the Situationists, only when such a reversal of perspective occurs does the possibility of the destruction of capital and the creation of new ways of relating occur.

Many 'revolutionaries', a term used in the slogan, have never reversed their perspective, and have created versions of capitalism uglier and more repressive than what had existed before 'Too many revolutionaries without a revolution; we need a revolution without revolutionaries.'

## ACW 20

Paul of Reading, responding to Feral Faun's response to his first letter

Feral Faun accused me of saying and implying things that I had neither said nor implied. I did not suggest that the *polis* is unquestionable, nor did I say that I wanted to 'change' capitalism. What I was attempting to argue was that 'opposing ideology' is not as simple and straightforward as labelling oneself a 'nihilist', individually adopting a bohemian lifestyle or mentality and then imagining oneself to be outside the social system and the political economy that reproduces ideology.

Feral Faun's Stirnerite egoism imposes an extreme *atomization* and *lonely separation* between human individuals, suppressing the *social* sides of human existence. Faun over-emphasises spontaneity rather than organisation. There have been moments in history when the creation of organisational forms such as workers' councils have made a valid contribution to insurrectionary situations.

Same issue: Mathew, Britain (editor of the 'marginals milieu' periodicals, *Leisure* and *Underground*), responding to Feral Faun:

What a cosy, nicely personalised way of adapting to capitalist society claiming the rejection of all social values is. After all, you can't be proved wrong can you? If I say that I want to destroy capitalist society, but not society as such, is that just because I'm thick? (One social value I don't want to get round to destroying is talking over ideas like this in order to get to a different position.) I wouldn't mind knowing just how someone who has destroyed all social values is supposed to get on with people they meet in the street, are they allowed to have mates? Claiming a pure intransigent relationship to society owes more to the tradition of avant garde art or the political vanguard in its despising of those who can't quite get round to destroying all those distastefully common social values.

Radical subjectivity needs to be supplemented by a collective subjectivity, the unities which extend, in my experience, far further than Feral dares to believe, further than the spasmodic tremor of riots in friendships. And not just in friendships - with millions of people I don't even know. The knowledge that millions of us had the government right over the barrel on the Poll Tax still gave me a sense of *our* power, *our* resistance that makes *me* go on and do more. And it is this relationship, the me and the us, me as part of us, that makes movement possible, that puts a sustained destruction of social relations with a price on everything well within our grasp.

Feral Faun's notion of fleeting revolutionary moments denies the versatility of those that make them and actually gives some kind of awesome magical power to those poised to defeat them.



What Feral Faun realises however is that, however temporary, a displacement of restraint with freedom is still a taste. Why the attempt to extend this infinity of freedom suddenly becomes, in Feral Faun's analysis, kind of ungroovy is a bit of a mystery.

Spontaneous reactions relating to housing and food production/distribution could become longterm and still not lose their necessity and vitality. This implies some kind of theoretical common ground in which to negotiate this unity.

There is a difference between theory and ideology: "theory is when you have ideas, ideology is when ideas have you"<sup>8</sup>. A common ground implies a relationship that already forms some kind of counter power to those of the dominant forces in society. These common grounds are where ideas and relationships are formed in antagonism to those which the powerful attempt to enforce. To deny this is to assign to power a near or complete control over us. To allow even theoretically the powerful such immense influence is to accept for ever the role of the marginalised. It's a heroic pose but a waste of time. We are the ones whose productivity keep the parasites in place and it is when we forget our strength or pretend to minimise it that they begin to win.

#### **Debate on nihilism: discussion**

The use of the past to inform contemporary perspectives and practice is well in evidence in the debate. The contributions review and evaluate the dictionary definitions of the term 'nihilist', its connotations, positive and negative, in the writings of 19th Russians, anarchist Kropotkin and novelist Turgenev; the context of the Situationists' use of the term, and whether this is approached entirely critically or not; and from this further evaluations are made of the value or not of the term in characterising perspectives.

The sense of a community with like-minded individuals is supported by the readership, for which the slogan 'Nihilists, one more effort..' acts as a signifier of common familiarity with the Situationist project. Explicit references to Situationist ideas are included, particularly in Feral Faun's contributions, and Faun quotes the Situationist slogan 'Too many revolutionaries without a revolution; we need a revolution without revolutionaries'.

The contributions search for deep issues emerging from oppositional stances, some relating directly to social and mutual relations. For example Feral Faun's call for the 'active questioning of every social value' is countered by Paul's critique of this as imposing atomization and lonely separation, and by Mathew's critique of this as an avant gardist claim for a pure intransigent relationship to society, which is underlined in his rhetorical question, 'I wouldn't mind knowing just how someone who has destroyed all social values is supposed to get on with people they meet in the street, are they allowed to have mates?'

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<sup>8</sup> Though no reference is given for this, it is generally attributed to the individualist anarchist philosopher Max Stirner.

The way in which those in anarchistic and post-Situationist milieux become involved in wider oppositional currents and waves of protests is clear from Mathew's allusion to his experience of the anti-poll tax movement and the sense of solidarity and power he derived from it.

Utopian rhetoric, poetic emotive evocations of a desired world, which are often absent in contemporary oppositional writing in a 'postmodern' world, surface at times in *Anti Clock-wise*, including in this debate on nihilism Mathew writes evocatively, for example, of 'the me and the us, me as part of us, that makes movement possible, that puts a sustained destruction of social relations with a price on everything, well within our grasp' Another example from elsewhere in the zine is Turner's rhetoric with a personal and emotional tenor:

'I want a world where we do not have to fear other people and where inequality no longer dictates all our lives' (*No 10*)

The tone of personal communication, initiated in the zine by Turner's conversational style addressed as though to a known audience, sets up a conversational note in the contributions to the zine. In the debate on nihilism, for example, Elliot Cantsin concludes his evaluation of the term, raising issues about its negative connotations, with a warm conversational touch communicated to Turner:

'But I see you are the right kind of nihilist...'

The debate also forms a forum for the process of differentiation from other anarchist and radical stances, in order to clarify one's own. Turner, in one elaboration of why he favours the term 'nihilist', uses it to differentiate his position from traditional politics, which plays into the hands of a huge spectacular game, and from the versions of anarchism. from the 'po-faced class struggle anarchists' devoid of spirit, creativity and new ideas, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, from green lifestyle anarchists, with their 'drippy search for personal nirvana conducted with disgusting middle class liberalism'.

Elliot Cantsin uses the term 'contemporary alternative culture anarchists' to describe the milieu of those who reject commercial capitalist class society. He draws on the past and issues raised by interpretations of the term 'nihilist'. He advocates the interpretation of the term as denoting those with values - 'aesthetes' and 'revolutionary artists' - which appeal to his sense of a connexion to the past, and a tradition to which he can relate. This is differentiated from Turgenev's negative conception of nihilists as without values, hating everything (which he locates in Turgenev's own position as a classist aristocrat, who saw the nihilists negate everything that he held dear, and who subsequently presented them as nihilists who negated everything and be eved in nothing). This illustrates the act of drawing on the past actively to create a sense of community and a tradition to which a sense of identity is derived.

Of the four people contributing to this debate, at least three are active in the post-Situationist milieu in terms of writing and publishing. This suggests that the most active contributors tend to be those who already have some prominence in their own spheres

The discussion above allows a historical and ethnographic understanding of a milieu interconnected through communications in print.

### **A discussion about violence**

A communication on violence is contributed to the zine from Stefan Szczelkun, a writer and artist active from the 1960s counterculture to the present, and founder of the Working Press in 1990. Turner responds and includes his views on violence alongside Szczelkun's (ACW 7).

Szczelkun:

The use of violent imagery in a casual way in progressive publications such as Stewart Home's *Smile* and *Anti Clock-wise* makes me fearful. A cultural climate in which violent imagery becomes uncritically acceptable seems to lead to the possibility of the acceptance of explicit violence within society, within Europe.

What is going on behind this resurgence of sadistic imagery and the need to consume it? The attraction to violence is rooted in the repression of fear and anger in children, for example in the stopping of tantrums, resulting in an irrational shift in the target of anger, and in a replaying of violence if tantrums are stopped with physical or psychological violence. These violent images that we desire are part of an intuitive tendency on our part to resolve the mess of violence, anger and fear within us, to express it, to have done with it. Violent imagery may go so far to make explicit the level of hurt we all experience from oppression, but it may not encourage any experience of healing or moving on.

Violent imagery, stories and rants often tread a fine line. Do they express a reality that is hidden? Do they ridicule our fear of violence and allow us to laugh? Do they allow us to experience passionate feelings which would otherwise be locked away within us? Do they ultimately lead to the end of humans harming other humans? OR do they devalue human life, drive us further into our shells of fear and institutionalise and glamorise violence?

Turner on violence (same issue):

I am afraid of violence but attacks on property associated with capitalism (ie. economic sabotage) are a tactic of class struggle politics, if backed by radical propaganda via texts, posters pirate radio etc

This exchange may represent the desire of an older individual broadly in the same milieu (ie Szczelkun) to pass on some of his own insights to a younger individual (Turner, born 1965 and in his twenties when producing his zines, is some 15 years younger than Szczelkun). Szczelkun refers to a 'resurgence of sadistic imagery', which alludes to his perception of a change in attitudes of what is considered acceptable in libertarian publications as the decades go by. There was a conscious rejection of violent imagery in the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s when the

peace and women's movements raised questions about patriarchal, military and violent symbols imagery and attitudes.

Szczelkun's interest in the emotional and psychotherapeutic dimensions of oppression derives from his experience in co-counselling. He has written of the emotional roots of oppression in his book *Class Myths and Culture*, and has organised workshops addressing similar issues (for example at the Anarchist Book Fair). As another active individual in marginal milieux, Szczelkun's contribution is another example of how those already prominent are most active in contributing in other forums, such as *ACW*.

### A discussion on sexuality

*Anti Clock wise* was focussed around themes, one of which was sexuality. Turner included a request for material on 'how sexual liberation can be integrated into the revolutionary project' (*ACW* 18). Issue 19 included several articles, including Turner's own thoughts and rants, a reprint of an article on 'Radical Feminism as Fascism', by US writer Bob Black, and a contribution from Mr Social Control, known as a performance poet and the author of the pamphlet *Away With All Cars* (see below). Mr Social Control's piece also explores the themes of 'nihilism', and the argument is summarised below.

Mr Social Control, *ACW* 19:

I'm assuming that your personal revolutionary project is to develop a fairly coherent theory/idea of nihilism based partly on good old situationism. This seems like a pretty healthy ambition for a young lad but the big problem with situationism is undoubtedly its fetishisation of sexuality.

Underpinning the perspectives of Reich, the Situationists, and Marcuse is the notion of the 'repressive hypothesis', according to French baldy Michel Foucault. This posits sexuality to be the perfectly authentic kind of social interaction, sexual desire, the perfectly unmediated form of desire. This also forms the common ground between the catholic church and Jerry Rubin's idea of revolutionary 'rock'n'roll and fucking in the streets'<sup>9</sup>. This 'repressive hypothesis' permeates most situ writing and leads to absurdities like Vaneigem, in *The Book of Pleasures*, bemoaning his lack of the freedom 'to touch a girl passing in the street'.

This is an example of a perspective which sees the unleashing of rampant sex as oppositional to the social order and its popularity is presumably explained because it exonerates the perpetrators of sexual aggression and blames their victims for being 'unliberated' or 'repressed'. This may explain the fascination that many boys who make their own magazines<sup>10</sup> etc seem to have conceived for the likes of Manson, de Sade and Brady

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<sup>9</sup> No reference is given for Rubin's work. Jerry Rubin was a member with Abbie Hoffman, of the Yippies, a radical group in late 1960s USA, who fused radical politics with hippy countercultural values.

<sup>1</sup> Though no explicit references are given here, such subjects as Manson, de Sade and Brady are the focus of the area of transgressive popular culture in which the magazine *Vague* party intersects. Charles Manson was imprisoned as the head of a cult which murdered people in Hollywood, 1969, including the actress Sharon Tate; the Marquis de Sade is the author of novels which explore fantasies of sado-

If sexually violent desires are regarded as authentic then these characters were doing sterling work for freedom by being so in touch with their true desire, as to be able to defy social convention.

On the other hand, if we recognise sexuality as being potentially mediated by power (by gender power in particular), then the fact that they're all men gives us the vital clue to work out that they're nothing but examples of socialised masculinity taken to its logical conclusion an inability to be in touch with one's desires to be empathic or compassionate.

A nihilist theory could reject the 'repressive hypothesis' and apply situationism's most powerful analytic tools to sex, moving beyond the accepted rituals by which mediated society structures our activities - overthrowing the tyranny of orgasm over pleasures, the tyranny of the genital over the bodily, the tyranny of penetration over everything else and the tyranny of the idea of 'sex' itself. Where does it begin and where does it end?

It is difficult to create alternatives (the Anarchist Book Fair is not formally any different from the social and commercial highlight of any other fragment's calendar. Nihilism, in its attempt to sweep away everything, ends up just a ghetto within a ghetto. Nihilists could extend their sphere to the totality of everyday life, including sexuality and the fetishisation of sex and commoditisation of sexual behaviour (exemplified by the 'page 3 girl' in The Sun by which sexuality is literally sold as a commodity, and by which sexual ideologies are internalised.

Nihilist theory could take on board aspects of radical feminism (such as that of Andrea Dworkin<sup>11</sup>).

A human theory that would glorify the ability to go and feel emotions, rather than going through the motions of feeling, could contribute towards deghettoising ourselves (as nihilists) by bringing nihilism into convergence with radical feminism's analysis of sexual power.

In the above issue, contributions by those active and prominent in anarchistic milieux, including Bob Black and Mr Social Control are included. Mr Social Control's piece argues for a nihilistic theory that draws on Situationist critiques to counter Situationism's fetishisation of sex. Mr Social Control's writing style draws directly on the Situationist use of word play (see Chapter 4), when he writes of 'go and feel emotions, rather than going through the motions of feeling'. Other ideas informing the argument are Foucault's critique of the 'repressive hypothesis' and radical feminism's critique of gender power

### **The car as a target and symbol of everyday life: from ACW to Away With All Cars**

The car is frequently targeted in anarchistic opposition - both as a symbol of the modern industrial system and as an object detested for its impact on the world and its use as a signifier

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masochistic sex amongst 18<sup>th</sup> aristocrats Ian Brady with Myra Hindley carried out the 'Moors Murders' of children in the early 1960s

<sup>1</sup> No reference is given for Andrea Dworkin's work. She is an American radical feminist known for her assertion that the state sanctions one kind of sex, penetrative sex

of status through commodities. Cars were attacked and burned during the events of 1968 in Paris (see Chapter 3) and the Situationists subjected them to explicit critique (eg Knabb ed 1981 pp.56-7, ; 67) During the Anti-Poll Tax riots in 1990, many cars, particularly the most expensive models such as a Porsche, were attacked or set fire to; the trashing of expensive cars has occurred in sporadic days of action in London, from June 18, 1999, to May Days 2000 and 2001; cars were trashed and burnt also in the summit demonstrations of Prague, 2000 and Genoa, 2001.

Anti car rants appear in both *Anti Clock-wise* and *No*. Turner, in one rant entitled simply 'Why I Hate Cars' (*ACW* 11), writes of cars as

'symptomatic of a greedy, selfish, destructive, materialistic, isolationist, covetous, unthinking society...drivers are cut off from the world by a force field of aluminium, (creating) alienation at its most blatant: the interaction of human beings is severely curtailed, which is just what governments want.' (11)

This rant provoked more response than any other article in *Anti Clock-wise* (*ACW* 17). Many of those who wrote believed that they were the only people to despise cars. This highlights the support offered by the rant and rhetoric of Turner's zines in providing a forum allowing individuals to become aware of others with similar views and generating a sense of mutual support in opposition. One reader, Olivier, writes from France, opening in a conversational tone 'I was so glad to find your article "Why I Hate Cars"'

He sets out his own anti-car arguments, such as:

'- car drivers waste space: not only do they need parking space at home, but also at work and in front of shops Cars occupy space in an authoritarian way, and no car drivers feel excluded because of the death danger...

'- cars isolate people. They strengthen selfishness...politicians prefer to build underground parking lots instead of supporting .free public transport.' (*ACW* 17)

Issue 17 of *ACW* is devoted to a critique of the car, and entitled 'CAR-NAGE'.

## AWAY WITH ALL CARS

The pamphlet *Away With All Cars* was written by Mr Social Control (see above) in the early 1990s, and is broadly contemporary with Turner's second series of zines, *No* The pamphlet was distributed, for example at the Anarchist Book Fair, by stalls connected to post-Situationist milieux, such as one at that time manned by Turner The pamphlet is written in a direct conversational style which compares to that of Turner's zines, and, like the zines, draws on anarchist and Situationist ideas in a rant addressed to the motorist directly, introduced with 'DEAR MOTORIST' Like Turner's rhetoric it is impassioned and cogent, but mostly rather reasonably and politely expressed. In the Situationist tradition and like Turner's rants, the rhetoric aims to expose the absurdity of the taken-for-granted phenomena of modern life The text is summarised below

**DEAR MOTORIST:** There are these large pieces of metal hurtling around at high speed in residential areas. They are such a menace to life and limb that every journey made by other means is chiefly spent dodging these monstrous objects. They are the single biggest cause of atmospheric pollution and global warming...Protecting ourselves from them has become our responsibility as pedestrians. It is not you who are supposed to stop, look and listen...The fact that we cannot cross the road if you are coming is so obvious, so banal, that it scarcely seems questionable. Yet surely this was not always the case, there was a time when we had the right of way?...Imagine a world where you always had to stop for us?...And who would spend £20,000 on a car under such circumstances? perhaps this is the key to the mystery. (1 1, 1 2, 2.3)

You have been sold a mere representation of freedom that is just enough to allow you to tolerate your intolerable daily life. We do not weep for you or the time you have spent working to pay for your car and its petrol. We weep for ourselves because drunk or sober you are mutilating and killing us. (2 4)

Crab apple trees were cut down in my street by the council after motorists thought it a nuisance to find windfalls on their bonnets. It is amazing that you all spend so much time cleaning and polishing machines that make everything else in sight such a filthy strinking mess. Crab apple trees are not a nuisance. Cars are a nuisance. Without cars we could have trees everywhere: Limes, Alder, Rowans, a line of dark Poplars instead of the Westway, great Oaks instead of the Brent Cross flyover. Where do you think oxygen comes from anyway? Out of your fucking exhaust pipe? (6.3)

The final irony is that you can gain no satisfaction from all the space that is being so generously turned over to your use (roads, car parks, garages, petrol stations, bridges, hospital space for road traffic accidents, out-of-town supermarkets for motorists). You do not actually use the space that you pass through even though you prevent us from using it, all you do is try to mitigate it by passing through it as quickly as possible..you just watch it go by, a boring television programme projected onto your windscreen (3 1, 3 6, 4 1)

The destruction on the environment caused by car production and traffic pollutes at its points of production and consumption and at every point in between. The fumes from burning petrol are the largest artificial sources of atmospheric carbon in the world. (5.3)

The holders of power are always beholden to power itself. In a world governed by stock prices the buck stops nowhere. It passes from Tokyo to London to New York and back again. Why should they care if the whole world is turned into a radiation soaked desert? If no human being can ever see the light of day? If every beautiful and useless creature in the world is exterminated for ever? If we are reduced to drinking our own piss miles underground, dependent on them for every breath of oxygen we take? And if they are willing to save the biosphere at this late hour then why do the greenest amongst them proclaim that the rainforests should be rescued only that

the plants be used to make herbal shampoo? Green experts assure us that they know what they are doing and hurry up with the next 25K wage packet please.

The truth is that ecological disaster would be a stroke of luck for those that benefit from the domination of our lives. The destruction of the atmosphere would entail a massive centralisation of political power. (5.5, 5.6)

Imagine the alternatives: pedestrian streets to trams, canals with decorative footbridges, municipal democracy with small local areas governed by the involvement of their inhabitants. (6.2)

We hate cars because we are sick of living in a world where we have no control over anything we do. We could be participating in the enjoyable. There is a distinction between watching a spectacle of life and really truly living. Unfortunately those anarchists (whoops, out of the closet now) who have adopted this distinction as part of their opinions have often obscured practical political activities that tend to confirm their theories (7.3)

*Away With All Cars* uses a direct appeal to the reader as motorist, with an urgent rhetoric made more powerful with the evocation of an emotional expression of frustration, such as in 'We do not weep for you... we weep for ourselves' (2.4), and 'Where do you think oxygen comes from anyway? Out of your fucking exhaust pipe?' (6.3)

Mr Social Control makes explicit the anarchist and Situationist influence quoting Guy Debord (3.1), citing the spectacle and calling for participation and local self-governing, and in his allusion to anarchists, which is accompanied by a humorous reference to letting this affiliation slip out ('(whoops, out of the closet now)')

The focus on car culture became strong in Britain in radical currents, and developed into the anti-road protest movement which peaked in 1995. The rants and invective against cars by Turner and Mr Social Control formed in a growing current of opposition to road-building. Mr Social Control's pamphlet makes use of graphics in the Situationist tradition: maps, also used in the Situationist's journal, include one of Twyford Down, which was the site of an anti-road protest and encampment during the early 1990s; a tyre print appears down the sides of one double page spread, denoting the impact of the car, an old letter, dated 1963, to the *Daily Telegraph* from a man in Hampstead, referring to the modern motorist as 'an undesirable member of the community' and protesting about how cars have forced pedestrians and cyclists off the road so that 'all the pleasure has gone', appears alongside other newspaper cuttings in the pamphlet.

## Conclusions

The zines *A n Clock-wise* and *No*, and the pamphlet *Away With All Cars*, are examples of projects informed and inspired in part by Situationist ideas, in their rants, rhetoric and visual images from popular and media culture



A sense of a community of like-minded individuals, brought into contact through the medium of the zines, is conveyed, and this is enhanced by the personal conversational warmth of Turner's writing. The debates discussed demonstrate the contributions by readers, particularly from those already active and prominent in related currents (for example Mr Social Control is a contributor to *Anti Clock-wise* and the writer of the pamphlet *Away With All Cars*). The discussion brings an ethnographic understanding of the ripples and currents which form as a network makes contact via periodicals and print.

The discussion also highlights Turner's own biography, and his awareness of class oppression, as playing a role in the formation of his ideas. He turns to 'nihilism' as part of a rejection of politics, including radical politics such as anarchism and ultra-leftism, which he saw as 'playing into the hands of a huge spectacular game'. The Situationist influence on his ideas is explicit, and he cites Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* as one of the most influential books he has read (CH). The Situationist flavour also emerges in the visual imagery used in Turner's zines, which combine text with slogans and detourned advertisements and comic strips. The debate on nihilism which spanned several issues of *Anti Clock-wise*, and which is summarised here, is an example which explores the way in which the past (Russian history, Turgenev, Kropotkin, the Situationists) is analysed as each protagonist in the debate fields their own perspectives and relationship not just to the notion of nihilism but to their own projects of social transformation. Other debates on violence and sexuality are also discussed to explore deeper emotional issues and the tension between the 'repressive hypothesis' and the sense of sexuality as mediated by power.

Anti-car rants appear in Turner's zines, continuing a critique which is also made by the Situationists. The chapter ends with an example of rhetoric in a similar style and from an intersecting milieu, with a summary of Mr Social Control's pamphlet *Away With All Cars* (undated, early 1990s), which uses a powerful style of rant addressed directly to the motorist. This emerged against a backdrop of growing anti-road protest in Britain in the early 1990s, which is also discussed in Chapter 12.

## Chapter 8

### Here and Now

The magazine *Here and Now* represents a post-Situationist project with a more serious, academic and even at times didactic approach than the zines *Anti Clock-wise* and *No*, discussed in the previous chapter. This is how Rick Turner expressed the contrast between the two projects:

'Well, the fun had to end somewhere. The deadly serious, grown up radicals are back so us grotty zine editors had better watch out...*Here and Now* is well written and seems to be essential reading for cultural anarchists, but, christ, I find it so boring. Sorry, but I've got to be honest, there isn't a spark of humour from front to back cover. Yeah, sure *Here and Now* are a smart bunch of folk but they really ought to lighten up a bit. Smile please and pass the Beano.' (review of *Here and Now* no.13 in *No* issue 6, early 1990s).

Another contrast between the two projects is the absence, in *Here and Now*, of any utopian or poetic rhetoric. As discussed in the previous chapter, Rick Turner's and Mr Social Control's style of rant and rhetoric, as a call to radical ideas, forms a link to the Situationists' use of poetry without poems and desire to evoke radical ideas in the reader (see Chapter 7). In this respect, Turner's zines do not break with the modernist project of reaching for a potentially universal audience. *Here and Now*, by contrast, is more cautious, didactic and academic in style: what is noticeable is the *absence* of rant, propaganda or rhetoric that aspires to reach a universal audience and awaken their potential radicality.

A primary motivation and focus in *Here and Now* (*H&N*) is the desire to mount critiques of existing radical currents (from animal rights activists to pacifists, feminism to anarchism). This forms a link to the Situationists in their critiques of other radical currents, though, in *H&N*'s case, the argument is generally reasonable and respectable (rather than adopting a snarling sardonic invective, as employed for example by Guy Debord) in its denunciations of other currents. Another characteristic of *H&N* is the boldness with which they subject existing radical theory and currents to scrutiny. For example, Alex Richards discusses the uncomfortable question of the influence of Parisian ultra-leftism on the Marxist-Leninist Khmer Rouge (1 pp.10-12).

*Here and Now*, founded in 1984 by a group of people in Glasgow with previous anarchist involvement, appeared sporadically for over 20 issues until 1999. One of the founding members described the project as combining an

'awareness of post-situationist, libertarian communist and neo-anarchist concerns with a desire to escape ideological straightjackets to identify anti-capitalist forces that reinforce the will for genuine freedom' (Jim McFarlane 1989, 'Clydeside Here and Now in *The Anarchist Age*)



Issue 5  
Summer 1987  
50p

# HERE AND NOW

Cover of *Here and Now* 5, using a photograph of the British Library (after being bombed in World War 2).

145a



This makes explicit the influences of the Situationists and libertarian communism. Another founding member referred to the premise on which *H&N*'s perspectives are based as rejecting all idealism - 'just continual despairing starting from zero' (Alex Richards, personal communication 17.9.89). Another encapsulation which evokes the rejection of idealism and the critical stance to all theories, came from Karen Strang (a painter who is married to one member of the *H&N* group) who saw their perspectives as not just 'anti' but 'anti-anti' (personal communication 1990).

### **The background of Glasgow's anarchist tradition**

The founding group in Glasgow had been previously involved with an anarchist group (Clydeside Anarchists). Glasgow has an enduring working class culture, with not only a strong labourist tradition but also a long libertarian and anarchist tradition - a fusion of workerism and individualist anarchism deriving from Max Stirner (McFarlane 1990 p.96). Anarchists, including the Clydeside Anarchists, were particularly active in the early 1980s after a revitalization of anarchist ideas engendered partly by the punk movement's espousal of anarchist attitudes and slogans, which brought a 'new influx of lively characters formerly involved in punk, CND or trotskyite circles' (ibid p.101). This renewal of anarchist interest and activity intensified during the Miners' Strike 1984-5, during which anarchists passed money from street collections directly to Strike Centres rather than to the National Union of Miners.

This was the backdrop to the formation of *H&N*, which represented a breaking away from Clydeside Anarchists. The founding group cited their frustrations as centring on the reluctance by anarchist groups to analyse the world. McFarlane also cites the militancy of anarchist groups and an observation that they 'tend to attract a "rank-and-file" member with an outlook predisposed to ideological certainties, an "idee fixe" which sees theory in terms of historical dogma, a heritage enshrined in tablets of stone' (ibid p.104).

### **Biographies: Scotland**

On the initial formation of the magazine in 1984, there were several who became involved on the basis of their differences with the Clydeside Anarchists, and these include Alex Richards, Jim McFarlane and Jack Murphy. These are all pen names. Contributors in the Glasgow group use either initials or pen names, in a conscious effort to avoid what they had previously seen as the tendency in anarchist groups for certain individuals to assume prominence and reproduce the 'star celebrity' system opposed by anarchists and post-Situationists, another motivating factor in using pen names was to avoid the practice of self-promotion and self-historification which is paramount in some circles.

The three founding members of the Glasgow group were as follows.

Jim McFarlane, who works as an Information Officer in a community centre, is also involved with the periodical *CounterInformation* and other interventions on the fringes of libertarian communist and anarchist oppositional movements. He studied sociology and politics at university in Scotland and wrote a BA dissertation on shipbuilding communities on Clydeside

Alex Richards works as a systems analyst for a company to which, during the 1980s, he made known his decision not to take promotion in the managerial career structure (an example of political perspectives informing everyday life) Richards studied computing at university in Scotland, and is described in one biographical note as 'a disenfranchised intellectual...(who) is one of Scotland's most regular subscribers to the American journal *Telos*' (the latter being a libertarian Marxist academic journal in which the ideas of the Frankfurt School are influential). He is married, with a son who is educated out of school (an example of a political perspective practised in everyday life).

Jack Murphy's work involved teaching mentally handicapped children. His interests lay in teaching, the greens and Murray Bookchin. His direct involvement with *H&N* continued until the early 1990s, when he moved with his family to the Orkneys.

Also involved were several individuals whose participation was not sustained beyond the first few issues. These included Malcolm Dickson, who edited the art magazine *Variant* which has published many articles in the radical libertarian line, John Alexander, who sold micro-computers for a living; K.H., who moved to Leeds to study and became involved with the Leeds group (see below), and now works as a university lecturer; and Di A Tribe (a name formed out of the word 'diatribe'), who wrote a diatribe against Marxism for issue 1.

### **Biographies: Leeds**

The Leeds *Here and Now* group formed in 1986, when Mike Peters, a sociology lecturer in Leeds with a background in Marxism rather than anarchism, combined with a rediscovered interest in the Situationists, wrote to the Glasgow group. The latter put him into contact with The Pleasure Tendency in Leeds - a group consisting of Steve Bushell, who worked as a nurse for some years until acquiring a printing press and an allotment in the early 1990s; and two 'pro-Situs' or devotees of the Situationists, who had met while at York University where they had started Situationist-inspired campaigns such as 'Fail Your Degree'. and who subsequently produced pro-Situ pamphlets Though based in Leeds, the Pleasure Tendency had had links with

Glasgow through a common involvement with the libertarian socialist group Solidarity, of which McFarlane of the Glasgow *H&N* group, and Bushell of the Pleasure Tendency, had both been members. There were also links with the London Workers Group (who had produced pamphlets such as *Workers' Playtime*), through which some of the Glasgow *H&N* members, The Pleasure Tendency, and Stewart Home (see Chapter 9) met. This illustrates a high degree of networking, across the UK from Glasgow, Leeds and London, during this period of the 1980s.

Others who subsequently became involved with the Leeds group, which formed in 1987, are as follows: Peter Suchin, a painter and lecturer with an interest in the avant garde, Gus MacDonald, a university lecturer; K H., who had contributed to early issues of *H&N* in Glasgow before moving to Leeds to study at university; and Colin Webster, also a university lecturer

The significant number of university lecturers in the Leeds group may have further contributed to the academic mode of writing characteristic of *H&N*

All those involved are male, though a couple of females have had passing links with *Here and Now*, such as Sadie Plant, author of *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (1992). The lack of female participants was discussed during my visit to meet the Leeds group in 1989 and Mike Peters' explanation was that 'they (women) have their own things'. Though women's groups were more prominent at this time than they were a decade later, this may not have been the most important factor. The lack of participation by women may relate to more general structural and historical factors. On the other hand, other groups which meet for discussion (for example the Free University, the Anarchist Research Group and the London Anarchist Forum) consist approximately of one or two women to every dozen men, so the absence of women in *H&N* may reflect some quality in its agenda or social network that does not appeal to women.

Those involved met regularly within their respective regional groups, and from time to time the Glasgow and Leeds participants met for discussion. Their high degree of familiarity with each others' ideas is evident. For example, in a readers' meeting in Leeds which I attended, I found that they operated a kind of shorthand for their ideas, such that those not familiar with them found it difficult to fathom what their critical perspectives, shared or differing, were. For example, the focus on managerialism (see below), on which Bushell and Peters were particularly keen, was not at this meeting elaborated on as to its significance for them. To that extent, there was a sense of an 'in-group' with a set of shared ideas and motivations, which was obscured to others (ie readers) outside the circle

### Shared agendas

*Here and Now* is unusual in the UK post-Situationist milieu in the relatively large number of people involved, with the project being sustained over one and a half decades of publication. This can be compared, for example, with Rick Turner's zines, which were a one-person effort sustained over five years (though Rick appreciates the enthusiasm of his readers as respondents and contributors which helped keep the zine going). *H&N*'s large editorial group, and longevity of publication, raises the question of what values are shared and to what extent there is a coherence of ideas operating amongst those involved.

When I first made contact with Mike Peters in Leeds in 1989, he set out what he saw as the shared values and common background on which his current involvement with *H&N* was based (letter 15.8.89). These factors were:

- 1) Shared moral revulsion against the social relations of capitalist/commodity economy.
- 2) Shared sense of the inadequacy of existing critical theories.
- 3) Shared recognition of the need for a new and better form of radical oppositional practice than that presently offered by what we call the 'official' opposition (the socialist, labourist, communist, anarchist, feminist, third-worldist, nationalist, green, black and other 'radicalism'...)
- 4) Shared sense of the importance of 'moral' aspects to radicalism: eg that an oppositional movement stands or falls ultimately on the basis of the quality and strength of its personal relations: the humaneness of people's behaviour towards other...and at the same time a view that a new kind of 'public' sphere needs to be forged...the idea [that] 'universalism' is not inevitably authoritarian...
- 5) Shared recognition of the important areas within which change may be sought (the 'cultural' sphere; the terrain now occupied by religion and the "spiritual"...)
- 6) Common background in or familiarity with the tradition represented by the "Situationist International"..

### **Group relations and conviviality**

Those involved in the *Here and Now* project are informed by theoretical perspectives relating to social relations. Mike Peters, in the set of shared values above, emphasises the 'moral' aspect of radicalism and argues that an oppositional movement 'stands or falls ultimately on the basis of the quality and strength of its personal relations' (point 4). Alex Richards' response to this was that, while he was totally in favour of 'decency' between participants in a project, he thought it was important to distinguish between these groups formed of decent personal relations and the "real movement which abolishes the state of things".

Richards had been addressing perspectives on the group or collective in relation to radical transformation for some years prior to the formation of the magazine in 1984. While participating in a musicians' collective, he wrote, in 1981, a counter proposal to a manifesto

(written by another individual about musicians collectives), which I want to discuss here since the notions expressed are commonly held amongst post-Situationists and anarchists, and the text illustrates the extent to which individuals aim to bring radical ideas to lived worlds. The text argues for creating collectives which live out the ideals of autonomy and conviviality that radicals desire, and which are not simply radical ideas attached to cultural forms like art and music and allowed to re-enter the same system of distribution and consumption - the one-way art and culture produced for consumption by an audience. This reiterates Situationist ideas of transforming everyday life in the here and now, rejecting the mediations of the spectacle and aiming for participatory culture. Though Debord's notion of the spectacle is not directly alluded to, Richards explicitly acknowledges his affirmation of 'another left' - from the Frankfurt School to *Telos*, from Socialisme ou Barbarie to the Situationist International to Baudrillard.

Richards argues against vanguardism and evangelism in the communication of radical ideas, and for the notion of autonomous conviviality which seeks and attracts like-minded people. In this way like-minded people are attracted to autonomous convivial spheres rather than being merely consumers or audiences of art and music with a radical message. As Richards put it, 'Propagation of such (radical) ideas throughout society...can only be through the coming-together of co-conspirators into convivial (or autonomous) activity groups, rather than through evangelism which can produce only consumers.

'The traditional left with its ideas of the vanguard continually causes confusion by substituting the representation of its own leadership for autonomous activities. In the confidence that autonomous activity continually appears, the vanguard idea can be abandoned for the search for like-minded co-conspirators' (Richards 'Towards a Theory of Musicians' Collectives' unpublished text 1981)

Richards goes on to argue that musicians' collectives founded primarily for the purposes of getting money from Arts Councils are not examples of convivial activity, and those groups with an informal convivial activity may find themselves 'frozen into an institutional form' once public funding is sought (ibid). Again, this is a widespread critical attitude amongst anarchists who reject public funding as the basis of activity, and aim for autonomy and self-funded and self-organised interventions.

### **Conviviality and autonomy as guiding principles**

The notions of conviviality and autonomy highlighted above inform those involved in *H&N* (see, for example, the discussion below of a talk given at Middlesex University) The concept of autonomy has a long tradition in anarchist, libertarian socialist and Situationist circles That of conviviality is perhaps less common but nonetheless appears to have been arrived at independently by some participants. A talk for the London Anarchist Forum (by S. Hayes, see Chapter 3) emphasised the notion of conviviality as a key means of creating an alternative world



that rejected large-scale consumer capitalist forms (one example given that was possible in the here and now was the creation of convivial relations by buying goods at small shops and markets rather than supermarkets) This use of the term conviviality, in very different circles, suggested to me that those using it might have known of Ivan Illich's use of the term in the book *Tools for Conviviality* (1973); both Hayes and Richards confirmed that they knew of Illich's book. Illich was influential during the 1970s and 1980s amongst radicals for his ideas on human-scale alternatives, anti-imperialism, and critiques of schools, capitalist technology and environmental destruction. Hayes, like Richards, is well versed in Situationist notions of the spectacle, but comes from entirely separate circles from *H&N*. This suggests that some of those sympathetic to Situationist critiques follow similar trajectories, arrived at independently, in their thinking and reading.

Another overlap between *H&N* perspectives and those of all the interventions discussed in this section from Rick Turner to Home and Vague, *Anarchy* to *Fifth Estate*, and including S. Hayes, is in their common rejection of political groups and emphasis on culture, convivial sociality and everyday life as areas in which radicals need to intervene for transformation.

### Situationist influence

Since my focus in this thesis is on post-Situationist currents, it is important that I analyse how the use of the past, in this case the project of the Situationists, manifests itself in *Here and Now*.

In earlier issues of *H&N*, the Situationist background and influence is not foregrounded and can only be discerned by those familiar with their ideas or those willing to pick through footnotes (for example McFarlane mentions 'the apostle of pleasure' in one article in issue 1, and the reader has to look to the footnote to find out that this refers to Raoul Vaneigem, whose writing in *The Book of Pleasures* is quoted in the main text). A listing of *H&N* in an American journal, whose editors are well versed in Situationist ideas, picks up the anarchist and ultra-leftist influence in *H&N* rather than the Situationist one (*Anarchy* issue 19 May-July 1989), which attests to the way in which the Situationist influence is not made explicit. This is in spite of the fact that one founding member of *H&N* referred to the formation of the magazine in 1984 as occurring after years of 'post-situationist discussion'.

In later issues, the common interest in the Situationists becomes clearer, particularly in response to the death of Guy Debord in 1994, when the *H&N* group produced a 'Guy Debord Supplement', a magazine accompanying issue 16/17 of *H&N*. The Supplement's content reveals, for the first time, the intensity of interest in the Situationists. Mike Peters, for example, describes, in the editorial to the Guy Debord Supplement, his rediscovery of Debord's writing in the mid-1980s, after his first 'early, admiringly semi-comprehending encounter' in 1970.

'As the erstwhile Left at large ..was quietly making its peace with capital ten years ago, I found myself going against the grain in becoming more and more impressed by a Debord who never entertained anything less than revolutionary expectations.' (Guy Debord Supplement 1994 p iii)

By issue 7-8 of *H&N*, the influence of the Situationists begins also to be more explicit. Mike Peters expresses the impact of Debord's ideas, writing, in a review of Debord's *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*

'Reading this after bouncing between the trance-like paralysis of Baudrillard and the interminable vacuity of Stuart Hall is like suddenly finding some of the terms with which to think.' (issue 7-8 1989 pp 32-33)

He describes the potential effect of Debord's writing, drawing on his own response and experience

'The effect of reading Debord on those able to decipher him is a bit like those legendary elixirs of immortality: once it has started to take effect, the reader ascends to a vantage point upon the present as a vantage point in history' (ibid)

This confirms the analysis of the intention behind and continuing appeal of Situationist texts, outlined in Chapter 4 of my thesis. Mike Peters' personal view on the effect of reading Debord is important in that it expresses the potential of Situationist texts to draw the reader out of the existing world into a critical position which sees everyday life not just as intolerable and as needing total transformation, but as a moment in history, which further exposes its manifestations of power and spectacle.

The notion of conviviality discussed above, and the focus on the Situationists, emerges explicitly from the *H&N* collective in an intervention which took place at Middlesex Polytechnic in 1991. Students involved in occupying Middlesex Polytechnic in 1991 had invited *H&N* members to give a talk. They chose to focus the talk on 'The Situationists and Beyond', and the talk discussed the critique of vanguardism with reference to the role of the Situationist International as a vanguard of intellectuals, alongside a critique of the Left and its 'busy little tribunes of contemporary Left groupuscules' which, they argued, shore up the State and give it legitimacy. They argued that the crisis of the left lay in its entanglement in 'statism' which either ignored or destroyed *the many actions and experiments and tendencies towards convivial living in the here and now* (my italics for emphasis) (Bulletin by the *H&N* group January 1992)

In this example of the talk given at Middlesex Polytechnic occupations, the Situationist International is used more as a stepping off point for a more general critique and analysis of the Left, with the argument that the existence of traditional leftist parties and groups and their usual tactics mitigates against autonomous convivial 'living in the here and now'. The last allusion reveals the significance of the title of the magazine, the usual content of which gives relatively rare allusions to the potential rhetorical power and significance of the phrase

Another example of an intervention which illustrates *H&N* members' desire to create more convivial relationships with readers as well as their intense focus on the Situationists, is a

meeting to which readers were invited. The meeting took place in Leeds 14-15 September 1991 and included talks (by Sadie Plant and Alex Richards) followed by discussion. The invitation sent to readers announced that the discussion would begin with 'a critical look at the Situationist International whose ideas *Here and Now* has sought to preserve and destroy'. This last phrase may be an ironic reference parodying the Situationists' tendency to dramatic rhetoric such as in their references to the realisation and supersession of art. Such parodies, only detectable by those cognoscenti in the know, are commonly made by Situationist aficionados (see Chapter 6). Nonetheless, whether ironic parody or straightforward writing, it reveals a rather dramatic relationship to the Situationists, and attests to the strength of focus and detailed knowledge of Situationist phenomena by *H&N* members.

### ***Here and Now*: content explored**

I want to refer now to a range of articles in *Here and Now* in order to illustrate something of the ideas covered, the Situationist influence, the tendency towards academicism and the absence of inspirational rhetoric (in contrast, for example, to *Anti Clock-wise* discussed in the previous chapter).

Most of the articles cited here are from earlier issues of *Here and Now*, when the founding Glasgow group were concerned to develop a critical analysis of the contemporary world and of current leftist and oppositional stances – analyses which they had found lacking in Clydeside Anarchists. The group were reluctant after the first six issues to restate ideas central to their thinking, which had already been propounded in early issues. They were also reluctant to publish a text (as a magazine, pamphlet or book) which set out their core ideas, as the libertarian socialist group Solidarity had done in the late 1960s with their booklet *As We See It* (McFarlane 1989).

### **The Political Personality**

An article on 'The Political Personality' by Jim McFarlane in the first issue of *H&N* illustrates the desire to analyse critically other oppositional currents, and to discuss the emotional underpinnings of various stances amongst authoritarians and libertarians alike. The tone of this article is moderate and sensitive, and can be contrasted with the tone of another article in a later issue of the magazine which is expressed in a more accusatory tone in its critique of single issue stances (Frank Dexter 'Language, Truth and Violence' issue 7&8 pp 9-23).

The article analyses how emotional repression (citing Reich's theory) is an aspect of a spectrum of phenomena in the contemporary world, from the mainstream to those opposed to it. McFarlane opens his argument with a contrast between the personal and the political by seeing

Referring to Wilhelm Reich (c. 1942-1970-1975)

two ends of a spectrum - from the personal but introspective emphasis of the therapeutic 'alternative ghetto', as he puts it, to the class warrior end of radical politics. The implication here (though McFarlane's elliptical style of writing tends to obscure the meaning) is a critique of the way in which spheres concerned with personal change cut themselves off from those focussed on political change, and vice versa. The perspective on political radicals as cutting themselves off from personal change is implied by the allusion to the old saying "I ain't gonna be much help in smashing the system ..because the system 's doing a pretty good job of smashing me".

I will summarise the rest of the argument as follows.

Jim McFarlane:

Politics has become a 'dirty word', becoming equated with fanaticism and inhumanity, as a result of totalitarian programmes implemented by regimes from those on the authoritarian left to Islamic fundamentalists.

Libertarians have drawn on theorists such as Wilhelm Reich (1975) to analyse the authoritarian personality and its links to sexual repression. Repression and 'character armour', as conceived by Reichian analysis, is at work in radical libertarian circles as well as in mainstream society. This repression goes deeper than sexual repression, to a spiritual unease which, in the USA for example, has been manipulated into Christian fundamentalism. The example of the urban guerrilla groups of the 1970s is a case in point, negating the struggles of ordinary people in favour of a spiralling growth of repression. Bommi Baumann (in *How It All Began* 1977) has chronicled his participation in an armed revolutionary group, and how he became separated from the alternative movement in being forced underground by illegal armed struggle. In the process, Baumann found he was cut off from the capacity to love and care for his fellow human beings.

Individualist projects such as those of pro-Situationists and Stimerites are self-indulgent and egocentric diversions or alternative hobbies. Those who opt for more collective activity by joining a political group however may be subject to less dramatic versions of the experience of Bommi Baumann in becoming cut off from the alternative movement. For some, the motivation in joining arises as much out of a need to cultivate new interests and meet people as a desire to build the party or organisation.

In anarchist and libertarian groups there is an additional or counterposing need to take up an identity of an "uncontrollable", a person acting out a total refusal to sanction the values of this society. The capacity to be enraged can burn itself out, and sometimes the person with it

Some of those who move away from radical politics may abandon their previous ideals as "unrealistic" or adopt a trendy-cynical pose. Others dilute their ideals into civil or community or single-issue politics more appropriate to the compartmentalisation of politics as yet another specialised hobby, largely separate from a revolutionary critique of everyday existence.

Others express rebellion through a bohemian lifestyle and alternative hedonism seeking se growth, encouraged by the theory that the pursuit of pleasure undercuts the values of this society. This is characterised by a search for a transformation of interpersonal relations without confronting the forces which shape, and reproduce as saleable commodities, the values which they embrace as different.

The banner of anti-sexism, which developed out of feminism from the 1970s, became a new moral code by which to discipline and regulate behaviour. Women's Centres, by erecting a predominant sexuality, that of Lesbianism, are simply inverting the 'tyranny' of heterosexuality for a new dominant culture, which may distance women who have relationships with men or who have children. This reinforces the marginalised appeal of feminist politics.<sup>2</sup>

The fear persists of acting freely, of thinking in a subversive way, of mutually supporting each other, and needs continually to be addressed. This needs more than the capacity to be enraged, and requires libertarians to nurture critical and self-conscious thought, combining emotional concerns with the dynamics of social change to identify how we can communicate our divergence from all the values around us. The first step is to ask the real questions, a task which has more often been achieved by fiction writers and artists in recent years than by revolutionaries. The next step requires the capacity to collectively transform how we live and mutually support each other in our efforts to discard the accumulated effects of the dominant culture.

### *Discussion*

McFarlane shows a use of the past in drawing on Situationist notions of a 'revolutionary critique of everyday existence', and in the use of Reich who was influential on Situationists such as Vaneygem. McFarlane has a gently didactic aim to expose to critique other radical poses and interventions, and in this he is engaging with the spectrum of alternative and mainstream strategies. The article reads as the words of one with some years' experience of radical groups, and observation of contemporary interventions, from lifestylism to women's centres.

### **Contemporary issues**

The first issue of *H&N* presents a combination of responses to issues developing at the time - for example the increased interest in anarchism at the time of the Miners' Strike of 1984-5, and developments in feminism, and discussion of ideas influential on those involved, from the Situationists to Castoriadis (at that time still referred to by his pen-name of Cardan). The second and third issues of the magazine continue to engage with contemporary developments. For

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Ian Welsh has made the observation that the criticisms of other oppositional circles tend towards the desire for a 'correct analysis' and thus embody the problem of the Situationist International. This is an interesting point though my own interpretation is that *Here and now* writers in general (at least McFarlane, in the article discussed here) aim rather to give critical evaluation of other currents in the desire to influence them and to raise the awareness of others rather than wishing to impose a 'correct analysis' on other spheres.

example animal rights grows in influence alongside anarchism during the 1980s, and is subjected to a critique by A.D. (Alex Richards) who sees animal rights as the 'transposition of life under capital onto mutely-suffering animals instead of onto human individuals' (no. 3 1986). McFarlane writes of the 'stress upon indignation and anti-intellectualism' and tendency to militantism which characterises both animals rights and some anarchist groups (1990 p.104).

## Riots

Another example is a debate about the riots which broke out sporadically in Britain during the 1980s, from the Brixton riot of 1981 to those in Handsworth, Brixton and Tottenham in the mid-1980s. The debate begins with an article on 'The Orchestration of the Riot', again by McFarlane. This is written in response to a riot at the European Cup Final. McFarlane article ranges from riots to critiques of autonomists and Class War.

I will summarise the debate as follows.

McFarlane (issue 2):

Activity by autonomists and revolutionary anarchists in Germany and Italy culminated in 1981 and their notion of the "Impossible Class" had given the impression that street violence would help spread revolution amongst disenchanted youth. After the euphoria of 'free shopping', they were unable to break out of their "ghetto", and their actions provoked new techniques of surveillance and crowd control which were subsequently deployed in the mining dispute of 1984-5.

By the mid-1980s, the terrain previously occupied by autonomists appeared to be hijacked by a fascist manipulation of unrest - with the aim not to undermine authority but to destabilise liberal democracy through escalating levels of tension and confrontation.

At the same time, libertarian circles such as Class War and the Stop the City organisers seek to compete within the framework of a macho/street credibility. On one level the "audacity" may be appealing but the scope for anything but momentary impact has been lost as new rituals, events and codes develop in tandem with media coverage.

[McFarlane continues] What does this critique leave? Here and Now recognise that the revolutionary activist as catalyst/detonator should be set against the need to develop an analysis of modern conditions. We need to identify what is radical within popular consciousness and avoid marginalisation of our ideas, and develop a manner of communication within the battle for ideas that provokes questioning, rather than merely reproducing images of revolt.

NB Before moving to the next issue's debate on riots, I want to draw attention to the way in which McFarlane's critique is germane to the anti-capitalist movement of the late 1990s to 00s and to the fact that, in 1999, McFarlane continued to be active in his gentle critical stance in the

events leading up to the June 18 1999 demonstrations which took place in London and across the Western world

K.H. 'Riots and their Respondents' no.3 Spring 1986 pp. 5-6.

Anarchist groups like Class War rejoice over the eruption of riots. Class War's dream of riot-like acts escalating into insurrection rests on a somewhat manipulative attitude of attention-seeking, adulation of violence and thuggery as being the highest expression of class warfare. This is politics reduced to that of 'toy cap' pranks and posturing vengeance. All of which may represent the antithesis of all things respectable - but represents nothing more, with its over-emphasis on the effects of spontaneous actions and a reliance on media images.

McFarlane issue 3:

The celebratory stance of pro-Situ writers BM Blob towards riots, football hooliganism and individual acts of violence during the 1980s (in a pamphlet by BM Blob entitled *Rebel Violence versus Hierarchical Violence*) is the blind faith of the born-again spontaneist, a belief that the current actions such as riots heralds the existence of an 'impossible class'.

A reader, Raf, issue 4:

A friend passed me a copy of your Spring 86 issue. I nearly tore it up in disgust. The smug, self-satisfied way that K.H. intellectualised about real events and dismissed them as having nothing to do with real politics ie white intellectual politics, was sickening. K.H. ignores black issues and black people's thoughts, feelings and opinions on the subject. The fact that black people call the riots 'uprisings' shows that they are serious expressions of Black people's anger and discontent. Black people will not forget events like the Deptford massacres, the deaths in police custody, the deportations, the everyday circumstances of our arrival, from countries impoverished for Britain's gain, to further boost that wealth. But it seems as if you do forget, and then go on to write an article about riots without even mentioning how black people saw the struggles.

K H., issue 4, responding to Raf.

Making no reference to black perspectives was an omission on my part. However I doubt whether my conclusions on riots would have been any different had I done so. I was more concerned with how leftists had responded to riots. The significance of riots in creating real change for those involved and for the rest of us is minimal. I am also dubious on this whole question of identity politics (eg Black identity, women/feminist identity etc). Surely this form of separation in politics is just reproducing the divisions imposed on us by capitalism? The riot as a form is no more effective in gaining real change in society than is the Petition, Terrorist Bomb, or joining the Labour party.

### *Debate on violence in Here and Now: discussion and observations*

Though some of the group expressed disappointment that provocative articles in general did not generate discussion as much as they would like, the debate summarised above on violence demonstrates that some topics engendered exchanges of views. Though *H&N* did not generate the 'dynamic enthusiasm' generated by Rick Turner's one-person zines, which were supported by an international circle of correspondents (see previous chapter), the collaborative effort involved in the editorial of *H&N*, and the responses of readers, helped sustain the magazine. The academicism of *H&N*, and its more sporadic production (18 issues over 15 years), may have mitigated against a more regular response by readers.

The debate on violence summarised above demonstrates further the engagement with contemporary developments in oppositional expression, and *H&N*'s desire to bring critical evaluation to its manifestations. This is more pronounced in *H&N* than in other post-Situationist projects discussed in this thesis. Rick Turner, for example, presents his critical perspectives on the more orthodox anarchists and leftists, but is more likely to give support to projects from which he himself has moved away, such as Class War (see 'Inspirational Class War' in *No* undated, late 1992) and the Zapatistas. *H&N* present critiques which, though often gently expressed, tend to argue for a refinement of oppositional practice in which manifestations such as riots, petitions, and single issue campaigns are considered diversionary.

The debate on violence also demonstrates an engagement with history as unfolding - for example, in McFarlane's analysis of the ground, involving street violence, occupied by autonomists in the early 1980s, as being hijacked by fascists on the authoritarian right, and also taken up by Class War and Stop the City organisation on the libertarian left. This demonstrates a high level reflection on structural, social and political developments and responses by oppositional currents. Though the critical perspectives tend to exclude any positive evaluation of emerging strands of oppositional activity, the evaluations seem motivated by a desire to encourage reflection on theory and practice amongst participants.

The debate summarised above, then, illustrates *H&N*'s editorial concern always to think beyond popular stances towards opposition, through theoretical reflection and practical considerations about the outcome of and response to manifestations such as riots, animal rights activism and single issue campaigns.

### **Academicism and intellectualising**

*H&N*'s characteristic academic style may have limited the potential of the magazine to reach or be heard by wider circles (though see below for an account of some of the efforts in engaging through other interventions). Certainly it was an often-voiced criticism by readers. Jim



McFarlane addressed the 'scourge' of academicism in issue 13, alongside some readers' critiques of the academic approach

This exchange will be summarised as follows

McFarlane, *H&N*:

The scourge of academicism is not unique to *H&N*. It isn't easy to shake off and the comfort of its cloisters rarely translates to an understanding of how people live. Nonetheless, *H&N* goes beyond academicism, since academic writing generally consists of essays pieced together by a collection of quotes laced with footnotes and reverential name-groups. The scepticism and criticism required in *H&N* is at odds with academic equivocation, prevarication and writing devoid of commitment and empathy

Paul F. Woods:

Criticises *H&N*'s academicism and professorialism and mentions his amusement at a phrase in one article in issue 12 by Colin Webster who wrote 'Turning now to...' Woods writes:

'I can just see our Colin, - corduroyed, bespectacled, possibly absent-minded - stooped over the lectern and his pile of yellowing wordprocessor printouts. So serious! so self-important? What's up with you guys? That was not a rhetorical question: I want an answer!' There is a definite hint of Bible Studies to the reverent manner in which previous articles from earlier editions of *H&N* are intoned.'

Stephen Small, Glasgow, writing with reference to a review of the Situationist Debord's autobiographical *Panegyric*:

The situationists would doubtless have said that you're just a bunch of ego-wankers, intellectualising for the sake of it, taking the piss out of the Situationist International's attempt at coherent action by a group. In order to avoid the difficulty of a single coherent organisational line by refusing to take a line. Instead you devote your time to discussing management-speak and managerialism, thus avoiding the danger of splits in the group over what constitute the group line

Steve Bushell, *H&N*.

Situationism needs to be mocked just as other fundamentalisms, on account particularly of their arrogance and studied contempt for those less in the 'know' than themselves. *H&N*'s resolute coherence is a means of questioning not the idea of truth but the way particular groups assert their own interests as the Truth. *H&N* rejects the attempt to dissolve uncertainty by submitting to a higher power, be it 'Earth', History, the State or plain old God. *H&N*'s focus on managerialism aims to reveal its pervasive and persuasive influence in many areas of conflict

Managerialism has the ability to transform discontent into manageable procedures and to turn longings for autonomy into the nightmare of self-management.

*Discussion of the exchange above on academicism and intellectualism*

One reader, Paul F. Woods, quoted above, accuses *H&N* of having a 'h nt of Bible Studies' in the reverent manner in which previous articles are intoned, which emphasises his critique of their apparently reverential attitude to their own project. It could be that *H&N*'s references to earlier articles may be made simply to save repetition rather than out of the reverence of those involved in bible studies. Paul Woods may nonetheless be articulating something of the way in which *H&N* uphold the common ground in their project with few concessions to a dialectic or dialogic approach.

Alongside the image of the Bible Studies group, Paul Woods also makes fun of the image of a stereotypical academic lecturer which one writer's article provokes. In a humorous caricature of the corduroyed bespectacled lecturer, Woods expresses his frustration with the academic mode of pontificating, which is another suggestion of a didactic one-way non-dialogic approach to discussion with which *H&N* is associated.

The other reader, Stephen Small in Glasgow, comes from another tack, criticising their lack of affirmation of projects (aside from their own, in Paul Woods' perceptions above), and their refusal to develop an explicit coherent group line. His critique of their focus on managerialism was one I heard voiced by other readers of *H&N*; this focus developed from the early 1990s, and meshes with their concern to analyse critically the existing world. Steve Bushell defends this focus by citing its potential for co-opting oppositional impulses by diverting them to a managerial illusion of employee participation.

What is of interest in Steve Bushell's explanation, of why Situationism needs to be mocked, just as other fundamentalisms, is the way in which this highlights some common ground amongst post-Situationists - the explicit rejection of all 'isms' and grounds of meaning (apart perhaps from their own). This critical stance towards, for example, the Situationists, varies between different individuals involved in *H&N*. Steve Bushell cites *H&N*'s rejection of submission to higher authorities to construct truth. This compares with the stance of the editor of the US periodical *Anarchy* (see Chapter 10), who draws on a radical phenomenological perspective to theorise the rejection of higher authority.

**Other interventions engaging with wider circles**

*Here and Now* members were more concerned than most post-Situationist and anarchist adherents to engage with wider circles in other interventions. This engagement was directed

both at the more anarchistic libertarian movements, and at wider, more mainstream circles broadly on the left

One intervention was by the Glasgow group of *H&N*, mainly Jim McFarlane, in the events leading up to the demonstrations of June 18 1999. The aim of the day of action was to be a world-wide show of resistance to capitalism. In London, this resulted in demonstrators entering major finance institutions such as the Stock Exchange

An event held in Scotland (3-4 April 1999) in the run up to the day of demonstrations was 'Easter Rising', including discussions on themes relating to consumerism and resistance. One discussion, 'Resistance and Effective Opposition to Global Capitalism', invites greater self-reflection and self-criticism in the radical milieu and is an illustration of McFarlane's gently didactic participation. The publicity hand-out raises issues about whether stunts, sabotage and other direct action empower people or lead to demoralisation, arrests or injury, and asks what lessons can be drawn from the history of opposition in the last 30 years. McFarlane's didactic engagement suggests a desire to enable the radical milieu to become more self-aware and self-critical, and to learn from the past.

This forms an example of an intersection directly with radical oppositional milieux in an effort to communicate ideas and encourage reflection. Other illustrations of the way in which those involved in *H&N* were active, in an effort to communicate ideas to wider more mainstream circles, include the following examples.

From 1987, those involved with Glasgow's *H&N* founding group were active in forming a discussion network named the 'Free University', in which monthly meetings were arranged with talks followed by discussion. The number in attendance varied from a few to more than 20, and the meetings appeared to attract some of those outside of the circle of people involved in radical libertarian ideas (which at the time included those involved in other magazines such as *Edinburgh Review*, *Variant*, and *Common Sense*).

Another event co-organised by *H&N*, the Free University, and *Edinburgh Review* (but this time in collaboration with a mainstream organisation Scottish Child), was a conference entitled 'Self-Determination and Power' (Govan, Glasgow, 10-11 January 1990). The event attracted 330 participants, most from Scotland but with a few from overseas, who ranged from social workers to anarchists. Noam Chomsky, renowned libertarian socialist and author, was the keynote speaker, and other speakers included James Kelman, George Davie, Alasdair Gray and Kathy Acker

This was an effort to engage with a wider milieu. The *H&N* and *Edinburgh Review* co-organisers were disappointed that those attending did not want to engage with their more radical perspectives or with a critical evaluation of conventional left opposition. It is possible that the collaboration with a magazine connected to the 'caring professions' (eg social work), which would generally be avoided by most anarchists and radical libertarians, played a role in attracting a more mainstream audience with less interest in radical ideas. It also suggests that

events such as conferences and discussions do not play a large role in communicating radical libertarian ideas to a wider audience

## Conclusions

The project of *Here and Now* has sustained publication and collaboration between members over a relatively long period of over 15 years. They have attempted to engage with a wider periphery through a range of interventions as well as the magazine project. The evaluation from *H&N* members is that this has not been as successful as they would like. The wider periphery of the mainstream left has, on balance, not fully engaged with a more radical set of perspectives, and most of those who attended events organised or co-organised by those involved in *H&N*, have tended to leave discussions and events with their ideas and agendas unchanged.

Nonetheless the project is part of the sphere of radical libertarian and post-Situationist currents which keep such ideas alive. *H&N*'s form of intervention has been characterised by a serious concern to engage with phenomena in the contemporary world, and to analyse manifestations both in the mainstream (the existing world that is opposed), and in the area of opposition itself. This forms an aspect of all the interventions discussed in this thesis. *Here and Now*'s version is more critical and less affirmative than some other projects, and what is notable by its absence is the lack of any utopian poetic rhetoric (such as is an element of Situationist tracts), and the lack of inspirational rants (which were an important element of Rick Turner's zines)

The project is notable in that it has involved over a dozen people in its editorial production, with a fairly high degree of commonality in their ideas. A familiarity with the Situationists is one element in this common ground, as is the desire to evaluate critically, rather than affirm, other radical perspectives. These evaluations extend to contemporary phenomena, such as the riots which erupted in the early 1980s.

One member of the founding editorial group, Alex Richards of Stirling, Scotland, was particularly forthcoming in providing me with examples of texts which set out further his ideas. These are discussed to clarify key ideas which inform many in post-Situationist and overlapping anarchist circles: the notion of conviviality in the here and now; the importance of autonomy self-funded, self-organised interventions which eschew funding from bodies such as arts councils, and the project of attracting co-conspirators through convivial autonomous spheres, rather than propagating a message through education and the arts (eg. theatre, music, visual art), which produces consumers or audiences of art and music with a radical message

*Here and Now* as a project has allowed its editorial members and readers a means of contact and discussion via the magazine. It draws on the past in that Situationist ideas are influential and are developed critically and with a concern to avoid a reverential approach to any body of work,

and the critique of submitting to a higher power – from God to the State – to avoid uncertainty is comparable to the critical theory propounded in *Anarchy*. (see Chapter 10)

## Chapter 9

### Popular culture and parody as style

The previous two chapters have discussed two contrasting interventions - the humorous highly visual zines *Anti Clock-wise* and *No* and the academic style of *Here and Now*. These projects emerge in the northern part of Britain. In this chapter the focus shifts to London<sup>1</sup>, and to two individuals whose projects are developed separately from each other, but who share some common ground. Tom Vague, of Notting Hill, London, produced a glossy covered magazine, *Vague*, the logo of which was a 'spoof' of the fashion magazine *Vogue*, from 1977 through to the 1990s. Stewart Home, of East London, produces a wide range of interventions from books to anti-art events, and, during the 1980s, produced the magazine *Smile*. Home's role in the anarchist and post-Situationist milieu is as a kind of *enfant terrible* who sets out to 'wind up' and provoke others with a relentless use of irony, parody and hoax.

Both share a common background in punk, which has formed a conduit to anarchist and radical ideas for a range of other anarchistic interventions, including Class War. Punk drew on slogans to express its provocational and oppositional attitude and invective - the title of the Sex Pistols' song 'Anarchy in the UK' being one of the best remembered slogans of the period.<sup>2</sup>

In Home and Vague's projects, slogans play a part in communicating the desired provocational and propagandising effect. Examples include Home's 'Demolish Serious Culture', used on flyers and expressing his anti-art stance; another from Home is 'Smile back at the Ruling Class', a slogan accompanying a photograph, first used by the Situationists in their journal, of two bottles, made into molotov cocktails, with a box of French matches on a door step (*Smile* 8); the same photograph is used on the cover of *Vague* 18/19. An example of a slogan in *Vague* is a quote, apparently from William Burroughs in 1969, on the potential for revolution in the West: 'Today we were unlucky. But remember, we only have to be lucky once...you have to be lucky always.' (back cover, *Vague* 16/17). The use of slogans is an important one in anarchistic and post-Situationist practice - a tradition which connects to the use of slogans, many of them Situationist-influenced, in the wall writing in May 68 in France (Chapter 3).

The projects of both Home and Vague aim for a particular audience through a specialised brand of popular cultural taste. Vague's audience is an intersection between a punk/post-punk area of popular music and a more anarchistic milieu, and Home's is an anarchist milieu

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<sup>1</sup> The London base is not a central feature of either project though Home emphasises his identity as a Londoner (personal communication) and London forms a background to many of his novels. Though he lives in east London he was brought up in Woking.

<sup>2</sup> Malcolm McLaren, punk Svengali and manager of the Sex Pistols was involved in the Situationist-linked King Mob (see Chapter 6), and his knowledge of Situationist practices, which included propagandizing via slogans, may have contributed something of that flavour to the slogan-orientation of the punk attitude.



# VAGUE



The photograph of bottles (molotov cocktails) and matches is used on a cover of both *Vague* 18/19 and issue 8 of Stewart Home's *Smile* magazine. The photograph derives from Gray's *Leaving the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* 1974, where it appears alongside extracts from the *Internationale Situationiste* journal, 6, 1961.

164a

## Control DATA MANUAL

9: PROGRAMMING PHENOMENA AND CONSPIRACY THEORY



# SMILE

Issue 8 30p Free to Shoplifters



## SMILE BACK AT THE RULING CLASS

The same Situationist-derived photograph used on the cover of Stewart Home's magazine *Smile*. Here it appears with the slogan 'SMILE BACK AT THE RULING CLASS'.

164b



intersecting with an art school market. Both mine areas of marginal popular cultural interest with an often transgressive or underground flavour, with topics ranging from performance artist Genesis P. Orridge, to conspiracy theory. This transgressive underground consciously and aggressively reject the mainstream, without necessarily communicating a radical libertarian political message. Vague's articles tend to be celebratory and uncritical and avoid evaluative or theoretical perspectives in discussing the material covered. Home's projects are characterised by a relentless use of parody and irony. Home's use of irony, furthermore, is not always obvious and his meaning is at times ambiguous. There is a tension in Home's work between the undercurrent of a utopian leaning and impulse and the aggressive provocational stance that appears to seek to destroy all affirmative leanings, even utopian ones, through the use of sarcastic and derisive invective.

Both projects carve out a niche in a specific sphere of anti-mainstream popular culture, and, in their appeal to a very select audience drawn to a parodic style, they appear to take up a more postmodern stance on the (im)possibility of reaching a universal audience. That is, the style seeks to attract those in a marginal area of popular cultural taste. This lends itself particularly strongly to analysis in terms of cultural capital and distinction in Bourdieu's (1979) sense of the terms. Home and Vague's projects, in terms of the audience they seek to attract, are bought and read as artefacts and representations by which their producers and audience alike create a sense of belonging in a marginal sphere of sophisticated provocational popular culture, and in doing so also express their own sphere of distinction and symbolic capital.

### **Tom Vague and *Vague***

Tom Vague was born and brought up in Salisbury, Wiltshire. After leaving school in 1976, he attended Salisbury Tech College where, he writes, he 'fell in with a football/Bowie crowd' and with some art school students who were the 'first punks in Salisbury' (Vague 1994 p.9). The fanzine *Vague* was initially organised by three other people as well as Vague, and began as 'little more than a way of getting into gigs for nothing' in the Salisbury/Bournemouth punk scene (ibid). After the first few issues, Vague was the only one willing to keep it going.

Vague worked as a 'roadie' (driver/organiser) for the punk band Adam and the Ants, and thereafter remained unemployed in order to do his 'stuff'. He calls his writing his 'stuff', a word he prefers to 'work', as part of his anti-work ethic, this informs his project and provides a common link with the American Bob Black (see Chapter 2), author of the essay on 'The Abolition of Work' (Black undated). One issue of *Vague* is dedicated 'To the friends who lent me money and kept me mercifully unemployed. No one can function without them. Again thanks' (20 1988 p 3).

His lifestyle shows a commitment to living outside of mainstream culture and conformity and therefore living on his radical ideas and rejecting careerism and the pursuit of money. This is

in spite of his potential to participate in more careerist structures, according to one writer in the music paper *New Musical Express*, who wrote:

'If Tom Vague could wake up to the 1980s he could become both publishing king and cool novelist, unfortunately for the moment he's content to work on *Vague* as a hobby.' (*NME* quoted in *Vague* 23 p 23)

Vague's writing at times refers to his rejection of work and 'proper jobs' and his liking for getting up late. In one snippet he gives an account of his philosophy of living

'.. Keep up the football ..Watch TV a lot...Drink a lot of tea and coffee and smoke at least 20 a day...Never get up before mid-day...Work as little as possible (Not at all at proper jobs)...Always have short spikey hair and wear as much black as possible...Read some books but get junk pop mags to keep your hatred sharp...Cultivate friendships with normal people - people you can talk football with - Avoid weirdos...' ((VAGUE PHILOSOPHY) in *Vague* 23 p.57)

The punk ethos is well represented in this philosophy - from the 'short spikey hair' to the keeping your 'hatred sharp'. The last reference connects to an attitude of anger which was an aspect of punk rebellious stance of insubordination, and Vague in this reveals his conscious cultivation of anger against the existing world of mainstream conformist culture.

He has lived for many years in Notting Hill, in a house owned by a Housing Association and shared with others. The house is light and airy, and has no banisters on the stairs. His personal space there is a very small room with a bed, chair and shelves full of books. When I met him there in 1989, I found his quietly spoken amiability stood in contrast to the hard punk attitude and transgressive underground interests which characterise the magazine. (See Chapter 7 for a similar point I make with reference to Rick Turner's friendly persona and the rants and rhetoric of his zines). My observation is echoed in one interview with Vague written up in a non-mainstream periodical, in which the interviewer contrasts the uncompromising critical inventiveness of *Vague* with Vague's generosity in conversation. The interview includes a review of *Vague* 16/17, and moves on to introduce the man:

'The 100 page glossy visual assault, a literary attempt to blow the lid off every social conditioning and repression of our time in a literal attempt to leave the 20th century, flew full steam ahead into the face of reality...

'Meeting Tom Vague is, of course, a ridiculously ordinary experience. When we met for this interview, even though he was struggling with a hangover, I found him to be generous in conversation and a good listener. He was more interested in discussing ideas and particular activities than himself or his past ...In effect, Tom Vague is a kind of anti-hero, the odd man out in the age of trivia, egos and personal ties, whose real business is the transmitting of revolutionary concepts as a first step towards revolutionary activity' (*Werewolf* 3 1986, quoted in *Vague* 23)

I have quoted this at length because, in addition to supporting my observation on the contrast between the magazine and the man, it forms an incisive cameo of Vague's own identity and relationship to the mainstream, and highlights his commitment to communicating radical oppositional ideas.

### **Vague the magazine**

The magazine is heavily illustrated with graphics with pages of text sometimes overprinted, which contributes to the punk fanzine style of presentation. The intersection with a pop music scene and audience is more evident in earlier issues, which feature articles on punk and rocknroll scenes, particularly punk-derived ones (from Clash to Crass). The reviews of *Vague* in music papers such as *Sounds*, *NME* and *Melody Maker* (for example as quoted in *Vague* 23 pp 63-65), also testify to the overlap with the sphere of popular music.

Vague includes in the front pages of the magazine a long list of people cited either as 'Inspirations' or 'Contributors'. The lists are a shifting testament to influences on his ideas: 'Inspirations' in 16/17 range from Situationists to Surrealists, pop musicians to actors, literary figures to occultists and include Aleister Crowley, Antonin Artaud, Arthur Rimbaud, Arthur Scargill, Brian Jones, Diana Rigg, Guy Debord, Raoul Vaneigem, Jack Kerouac, James Dean, Lou Reed, William Burroughs and William Shakespeare); 'Contributors' range from Guy Debord and Raoul Vaneigem to Genesis P. Orridge; and from Larry Law (*Spectacular Times*) to Bob Black to 'Me Mum'.

Also included in the list of contributors are many names that appear to form a network of contacts and associates formed via Vague's involvement with the magazine. This suggests that the magazine, which began in Vague's early punk days as a way of getting into gigs for free, acts as a means by which social networking with like-minded people is enabled. The magazine as an artefact forms, for both editor and audience, a point of contact and a means of creating a sense of community

In Vague's brand of intervention, the magazine acts as a vector of ideas, some of them anti-authoritarian. This explores a seam of underground, sometimes transgressive, culture that intersects with a particular milieu linked by a taste for this phenomena - from left guerilla groups such as the Red Army Faction, to terrorists like Carlos the Jackal, to the occult to conspiracy theory to serial killers. The lack of critical evaluation from Vague as writer and editor in selecting this material makes for a disturbing tone of celebration of dubious phenomena. The mix provokes critical responses from writers of other broadly oppositional material, and exchanges of letters, between the writers of reviews and respondents, and Vague himself are printed. One reviewer summed up the content of *Vague* issue 18/19 as 'pages of borrowed, ripped-off articles, graphic and assorted fragments on everything from Situationist slogans, right-wing conspiracy theories, JFK assassination, Charles

Manson.. Full of interesting bits and pieces, none of them evaluated, this a kind of psychedelic conspiracy theory soup' (Robin Ramsay in *Lobster* quoted in *Vague* 21)

Vague responds with much sarcasm, saying 'as far as the...Freemasons...JFK etc goes, I haven't got a definitive evaluation to make. Have you? They don't effect my life that much ...in future stow the cheap shots.' (ibid)

Ramsay responds 'you certainly are picky ..How the fuck am I supposed to know that you aren't what it looks like?.. (Christ, I thought I'd given it a good review)'

And Vague gives himself the final word

'Dear Robin, just fuck off. Poxy two-bit John Pilger<sup>3</sup>.'

The exchange steers a fine line between insult and humorous ribbing, and shows each defending their own projects while criticising the other's approach (*Lobster's* investigative journalism approach to areas like conspiracy theory versus Tom Vague's approach of printing material with no evaluation).

The Situationist influence and interest is well in evidence, sometimes in a fanzine approach such as in Vague's 'The boy scout guide to situationism' in issue 16/17. At times, Situationist quotes and slogans are used out of context and harnessed to other material. Vague selects Situationist material that is 'grist' for his uncritical 'mill'. For example, a long article on left terrorist groups contains sporadic quotes from Situationist Raoul Vaneigem (eg. pp. 45 and 70) Though critical evaluations of acts of terror can be read into Vaneigem's quotes, their use creates a narrative that, without a developed argument and evaluation from Vague, has the effect of weaving Situationist pronouncements, taken out of context, into an uncritical role.

### **Popular culture/high culture sensation, transgression**

*Vague* taps an audience through a popular cultural appeal which overlaps with tabloid newspaper sensationalism in its taste for transgressive phenomena. In *Vague* the topics covered, as in the tabloid press, are objects of fascination; the difference lies in Vague's uncritical style, which at times veers towards celebration, and the tabloid press's attitude of disgust and derision. Vague's interest in the underground, even in serial killers and murderers, could be interpreted in terms of seeking areas of symbolic revenge against the mainstream. The tabloid press may be seen as constructing images of convention and normality, through disgust, at actions which break with norms. By contrast, in the more underground transgressive approach adopted in *Vague*, the fascination with such acts bespeaks a symbolic desire for revenge against all that is seen as wrong in the world. The sphere of 'evil' is inverted: for mainstream popular culture and the tabloid press cults and killers are evil, in *Vague* the world is evil and cults and killers wreak revenge upon the world. The act of focussing on this material - in the act of writing and editing

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<sup>3</sup> John Pilger is a journalist who through newspaper articles and television documentaries, propounds critical perspectives broadly of the left

and in the audience reading about it - forms a symbolic expression of revenge against the existing order which has created such extreme responses.

There is an overlap with mainstream popular culture in that popular culture is seen by its now unfashionable critics (from Adorno and Horkheimer to Leavis and Hoggart) to appeal to the baser instincts and taste of the mass. *Vague* then makes an appeal to popular cultural tastes for sensation that may be analysed as being constituted by the modern world and its brutalizing, and atomizing qualities.

Despite the popular cultural element, there is also an appeal to a more high cultural sphere of cultural capital - the marginal, the wierd, the esoteric as expressing a sense of differentiation from the mainstream. An example in *Vague* of a transgressive high cultural sphere of interest is the focus on the interventions of the milieu around performance artist Genesis P. Orridge; this is an interest he shares with Stewart Home. In issue 16/17 of *Vague*, the Situationists are given 12 pages of discussion, and Genesis P. Orridge and related interventions 23 pages. Orridge has been a performance artist since the 1960s, tending towards shock value transgressive acts involving for example live chickens, sado-masochistic attire, blood from body mutilation, and a fascination with and ambiguous references to the Holocaust. He is associated with the group COUM Transmissions; from the 1970s, he produced music with Throbbing Gristle, and, during the 1980s, began Psychick TV, which influenced the Temple of Psychick youth, a network (mainly young men) combining anti-authoritarian ideas with an interest in the occult. This sphere of phenomena, with its esoteric high cultural elements, is one means by which *Vague* creates differentiation and appeals to a particular audience drawn to transgressive marginalia.

Home and *Vague* do not collaborate on projects but share a mutual recognition of their common ground and respect for each other's differences. *Vague* has printed many of Home's manifestos and propagandising in the pages of *Vague* magazine, and Home has spoken of his affinity with *Vague* and their common ground as former punks (*Variant* 1989 also quoted in *Vague* 23 p.65)

### Stewart Home

My first encounter with Stewart Home was at an anti-art exhibition organised by Home in Shepherd's Bush, West London, as part of the Festival of Plagiarism in 1988. I had come across his magazine *Smile*, which he produced in the 1970s as vehicle for his brand of irony and hard Situationist slogans. The gallery was virtually devoid of 'artworks', which was part of the anti-art stance. Home and a group of several of his friends and associates seemed a little surprised at my arrival (with my newborn baby and five year old boy), and nonetheless made an effort to be friendly and handed us badges with slogans such as 'Give Up Art'. When he heard that I wanted to talk to him as part of my research and writing about the marginal scene of which he was a part, Stewart Home was for several months a regular visitor to my house, where he dropped in on his way, by bicycle, from East London to his mother's house in Richmond.

In common with the other people others who I encountered, including Turner and Vague, there is a pronounced contrast between the hard rhetoric and images of their texts and their sociable, amiable personalities and 'being in the world'. I found Home the man to be friendly and quietly spoken, if a little tense in manner, in contrast to his aggressive rhetoric, relentless irony and sarcasm, and tendency to be involved in feuds via print. He was very happy to sit and drink cups of tea and converse with me, though in one letter he thought to raise the point that he might be using my thesis as another way of inserting his interventions into a high cultural (ie. academic) sphere.

Other contrasts are between the perception of his identity by those in the milieu, some of whom may take the mindless sex and violence of his pulp novels as an indication of the seedy, depraved or decadent character of Home the author. Home's own lifestyle is highly principled: he is, for example a teetotaler, vehemently anti-smoking, and he will have a go at people who smoke for example in the London tube system or who drop litter in the street. Home's personable character ensures that, despite his many feuds and scathing invective, he has circles of friends who understand and enjoy his provocational ironic stances, even if they tend not to share his desire to participate in the feuds. His critical and parodic stance, however, and his self-confessed self-promotion (most of his books show his photograph on the cover and he is always in keen pursuit of outlets, including those in mainstream or high cultural spheres, for his work) antagonises many of those in the anarchist milieu, and arouses some resentment.

Stewart Home, born in 1962, was brought up in Woking, Surrey by his adoptive parents. He saw school and college as a 'waste of time'. He describes his class at school as 'the cream of this crappy secondary modern school' where 'we were told we were too thick to read Shakespeare'. He cites this experience as formative in his later relentless reading of texts by and about the Situationists in order to prove he could understand and demythologize them. As he said in the context of his experience of school in which his class was told they were not able to read Shakespeare

'So my attitude was, well fuck you. I'll read it and keep re-reading it until I understand it just to prove you're wrong, and afterwards I'll tell you it's shit.' (1989 'Marx, Christ & Satan United in Struggle: Stewart Home interviewed by Karen Goaman' in *Variant 7* p.20)

This informs many of his interventions, particularly his research into and critiques of the Situationists (see below).

He describes his education as largely informal, taking place outside of school and the History of Ideas course he took at Kingston Polytechnic from which, he says, he was thrown out in his final year after 'repeatedly criticising the way the teachers used the spectre of failure and poor grades as a means of enforcing intellectual conformity' (ibid)

His involvement in punk, attending gigs and participating in a punk band, was a conduit to radical ideas and an inspiration to him as a teenager. It was journalistic articles on punk, which

mentioned anarchism and avant garde movements like Dada and Futurism, that sparked his interest in find out more about them

Since the 1980s, Home's interventions have ranged from playful performance art and poetry to (anti-)art exhibitions at galleries to pulp novels to journalism to writing and self-publishing propaganda (pamphlets, flyers etc) to publicise his agenda, which is promoted in events ranging from his three-year, one-person 'Art Strike' to sporadic ones engaged in his on-going 'Demolish Serious Culture' stance.

In common with all other writers discussed in these chapters, he is widely read and theoretically informed, and his take on the distinction between, for example, high culture and popular culture, which forms an important aspect of his work, as will emerge below, is informed by readings of theorists including Adorno and Horkheimer (1944/1969). Home's project tends to reverse their reading of this distinction. Rather than criticising mass culture and seeing high culture as the sphere in which critical ideas can be developed, Home attacks high culture as elitist and inaccessible, using its spheres only as a means of making an anti-art statement, and using ironic plays on popular cultural forms (pulp novels by Richard Allen on skinheads for example) in his own writing. Further discussion on these themes is included in an interview with Home, published in *Variant* (see Goaman 1989).

### **Class issues, anarchism, Situationists**

Stewart Home invokes in many of his projects a class antagonism and an attack on the manifestations of high culture and specialist knowledge, which he connects with middle class cultural capital. He is conscious of having a 'chip on his shoulder' and of directing 'hatred against all the wankers who told me I was nothing because I went to school on a GLC [Greater London Council] overspill estate' (ibid p.23).

He sees the class struggle anarchism sphere of the anarchist movement (see Chapter 2) to be a background to his work, and there is some common ground in the espousal of popular culture and attack on middle class and high culture that characterises Class War's slogans and texts.

One playful example of one of Home's earlier interventions, which sought to expose what he sees as the pretentiousness of high culture, was a poetry reading venue which Home attended during the 1980s. On occasion he read out poems which he had written about vegetables, as a parody intended to criticise the pretentiousness and elitism of serious culture. As a performance stunt and to add to the 'wind up' value, he would throw vegetables at the audience during his reading. When he found that the audience just threw them back, he devised the method of throwing frozen peas at the audience which was effective because peas were too small for the audience to pick up and throw back (personal communication 1989).

His parodic espousal of popular cultural forms (for example his novels which are parodies of pulp fiction such as that of Richard Allen's skinhead novels) are conscious attempts to use

working class popular culture (though the parodic element skilfully steers these in the direction of high culture which will fit with Home's self-promotional stance).

### **The Situationists and a furious attack on the myth of the total revolutionary critique**

Home has been engaged for many years on an attack on the Situationists, whose project he subjects to a brand of sardonic, sarcastic and parodic critique. He is one of those aficionados in the 'critical cleric' milieu of post-Situationists (see Chapter 6) who has put in years of research and reading into the minute details of their history and writings, as part of a project to demythologise them and to ridicule anyone he regards as a pro-Situ or follower of the Situationists. One effect of this is that it appears to draw him into the same pro-Situ aficionado camp by inversion - rather as Satanists are tied to Christianity by inversion

Home's own explanation for his research into and intense focus on the Situationists is that it relates to his experience at school (see above) of being told his class was 'too thick to read Shakespeare', and a subsequent replay of this experience when he first encountered Situationist texts. In his own words:

'When I was first involved with the anarchist scene in London I can remember people giving me Situationist texts to read but refusing to explain what they meant. If I told them I didn't understand their pamphlets they told me I was stupid. If I really pressed them they'd say the Situationists provided the total revolutionary critique. To me this attitude didn't seem any different to how the teachers had behaved at school...' (ibid p.20)

This motivated his years of intensive reading, and his writing *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrism to Class War* (Home 1988), and there appears to be a struggle against the experience of being put down by authority figures (teachers), mixed with a reaction against middle class 'symbolic capital'. Home sees his motivation in writing the book as arising from a desire to attack this. As he put it,

'I wanted the book [*The Assault on Culture*] to be a kind of bluff-your-way guide, to deprive these ex-public school boys within the anarchist movement of their specialist knowledge.' (Stewart Home Interviewed by Karen Goaman *Variant* 1989 p.20)

Another motivating factor is a desire to discredit Situationist texts in order to attack those he regards as pro-Situs

'The point is I have to deal with individuals who use so-called situationist ideas and the myth created around the group in a very oppressive way. I've found that the most effective tactic to use against these people is to undercut the credibility of Debord and Vaneigem, both of whom were in any case poor theorists...the reader was encouraged to treat this (Situationist) propaganda as theory. As a result it's very difficult to get individuals who've undergone a political conversion from devouring these texts to view them critically.' (ibid pp. 20-21)

Home, then, positions pro-Situs and others in the anarchist movement with a knowledge of their ideas as middle class public school educated males to be attacked for their 'specialist



knowledge'. This is within the frame of the class struggle anarchist attitude: Class War for example target cultural manifestations of middle class and ruling class snobbery and elitist gatherings such as the Henley Regatta.

Home's approach to the Situationists is an inverse of Vague's while Vague's approach is celebratory and avoids critical evaluation of the material covered, including the Situationists, Home's is derisory. In *The Assault on Culture* (Home 1988), for example, his discussion of the Situationists takes the form of minute details of different personages, events and dates (perhaps parodying the idea of specialist and clerical knowledge), with sporadic judgements by Home on Situationist texts, criticising their theoretical incoherence, vanguardism and stale ideology. (eg. 1988 p.30)

The judgements made by Home about the Situationists, apparently motivated by his desire to attack and provoke those he sees as 'pro-Situs', resulted in an exchange of letters about *The Assault on Culture* between one pro-Situ and Home. Lucy Forsyth, a 'pro-Situ', takes issue with Home's insulting language when he described meetings between some British pro-Situs, and Guy Debord as 'the miserable little milieu centred on Debord and the Champ Libre publishers in Paris'. Forsyth, correcting his factual information about who met Debord at this time, accuses Home of presenting 'any old tittle tattle' as facts and adds, in parentheses, '(and we certainly didn't find our own company lacking in amusement, although we certainly wouldn't have wanted a fart like you along with us to quantitatively measure "fun")'. (Vague 21 p.94).

Home replies by criticising the Situationists as 'little more than the ideas of the Frankfurt School dressed up in surrealist clichés', and calls Forsyth a 'servile fan of spectro-situationist "theory"' (ibid). The way in which Home's provocations result in responses of anger from those targeted, which allows him another chance to promote his goal of demolishing the Situationist project, is a factor in the relentless feuds which Home carries out, and this is discussed further below.

Some reviews from within the post-Situationist milieu noted other motivations underpinning Home's approach to the material in the book. For example, Angus McDonald, writing in *Here and Now*, takes issue with the book's claim to be an introductory guide to utopian currents, as expressed in the subtitle. McDonald writes that it is 'nothing of the sort. It is a poem on two fronts. First, an attempt to claim a heritage which can legitimate current art practices (including Home's own). Second, an attempt to specify within that heritage those elements to which he attaches the greatest importance' (McDonald 'Not What it Seems' *Here and Now* 7&8 p 30).

In another book edited by Home on the Situationists, the title also appears to misrepresent the book's content so that it is 'Not What it Seems', to use McDonald's title of his review (see above). Home edited a book entitled *What is Situationism? A Reader*, the title of which presents it as an introductory reader on the Situationists. Most of the articles neglect to examine or evaluate Situationist ideas and texts, and consist, rather, of critiques or detailed histories

Home as editor includes a brief introduction in which his use of sarcasm, self-promotion, and posed scurrilousness, expresses his intent to discredit Situationist ideas and debunk the Situationists from any status as gurus. Home accuses certain authors of the articles which he has selected for the book, of entrepreneurial careerism:

'Everyone who writes has an axe to grind, since this is particularly true of those who write about the situationists, I feel completely justified in making a few comments about the words that follow and passing judgement on the individuals who wrote them. Guy Debord isn't the only corpse to make a career out of situationism. All those who've composed texts on the subject are guilty of this crime...(eg. Dave and Stuart Wise and King Mob). Their texts also played a major role in transforming situationism from a fringe product without commercial value into a saleable commodity...Back issues of King Mob ..give a valuable insight into how these entrepreneurs developed their promotional skills.' (Home 1996 p.1-2)

Having reduced other writers including Debord and pro-situs to those (corpses) who make a career out of writing about the Situationists and transform them to commercial commodities, Home ends the introduction with further emphasis on Situationist texts and ideas as commodity items, and with an attempt to present the projects in which he has been involved as part of the same tradition. He looks forward to more translations published 'as very slim and expensive editions, and ends:

'Now that it's run through the sixties underground/avant garde, the culture industry is diving headlong into the seventies and eighties - which means we'll soon be seeing much serious discussion of neoism, plagiarism and the art strike. The tradition marches on...' (Home ed 1996 p.2)

The derisive discrediting of Situationist texts as commodities, and of the Situationists and those who write about them, as merely careerists, and the presumably ironic self promotion, appears to be a continuation of Home's long-standing project to antagonise 'pro-Situs' and those who find inspiration in Situationist ideas, the more so by presenting the angle in a book which presents itself as an introductory guide to the 'novice'

## Feuds

Home's engagement in feuds as a result of his provocations gathered apace during the 1990s. Feuds were carried out, in print, between Home and individuals such as Larry O'Hara, a writer on anti-fascist issues; the editors of the periodical *Green Anarchist*, and the pro-Situ Michel Prigent. Home's feud with Prigent originated during the late 1980s, and has erupted periodically since. It began as an exchange when Home and Prigent were part of the audience at a talk about the Situationists at the Tate Gallery (14 6 1988), which is documented in *Vague* 21 p 96. During the late 1990s, a re-eruption of an ongoing feud between Home and Prigent reached some intensity as each delivered their latest printed text of vituperative repost to the other to the

basement (radical books section) of Compendium Bookshop in Camden Town, London. According to the bookshop assistant who witnessed the personal deliveries of these texts, Prigent appeared distressed and angry, while Home apparently enjoyed the process of taunting and provocation. On one occasion, Prigent drew a Hitler-style moustache on a printed photograph of Home; this was received with amusement by Home. Home always targets those within the oppositional milieu of which he is a part .

There is a destructive element in this, and some of those in the milieu resent his actions to the extent of accusing him of acting like an agent provocateur or a fascist. Although such invectives in print are not confined to Home and his targets (there have been splits and accusations for example between those involved in or associated with the periodical *Green Anarchist*), Home's apparently deliberate provocations and his enjoyment of taunting others is certainly perverse. One of his motivations appears to be in attacking positions and projects which others find an identification with - from an interest with the Situationist project to a concern with anti-fascism. Those who respond and defend their project become drawn into a game which Home enjoys. He appears to thrive on notoriety and on becoming an object of resentment or even hatred by those he provokes. The fact that these feuds are relentlessly pursued by Home, however, suggests that he does not derive the satisfaction from them that he desires.

## Historification

An element in Home's work is his explicit concern with historification. During his own research on the Situationists, he found that those whose texts were archived had the power to influence the perception of the researcher, and he is assiduous in writing about, printing and archiving all his interventions and feuds in an apparently parodic attempt to gain a position in the 'traditions about which he writes. Unlike most of those involved in anarchist publishing, he is always punctilious in sending copies of all his texts to the British Library, which aims to archive all published texts. Periodically he gathers his pamphlet and flyer material, including those of his feuds in print, into books (for example *Neoist Manifestos* 1991, *Neoism, Plagiarism & Praxis* 1995, *Green Apocalypse* 1996, *Confusion Incorporated. A Collection of Lies, Hoaxes & Hidden Truths* 1994)

## Neoism

Neoism, a possibly parodic attempt to form an avant garde group during the 1980s and 1990s, is archived in the texts listed above and in Home's book, *The Assault on Culture Utopian Currents from Lettrism to Class War* (1988, discussed above). The book is an attempt to present a lineage into which Home's projects can be inserted. Peter Suchin, reviewing the book which he sees as 'functioning as a kind of vade mecum of modern, pseudo-artworld rebellion', writes

that he could find nothing utopian or avant gardist in the activities described in the chapter on 'Neoism' which

'reveal themselves to be nothing more than obsessively executed panks, from which are gathered no critical mileage whatsoever' (*Variant* 6 Spring 1989 p.21)

Home's attempts to historicify Neoism in the avant garde tradition is contradictory given his contempt for the avant garde, and this gives weight to the notion of the Neoist historification as bogus, part of a hoax, and part of his provocational stance which combines self-promotion and a transparent search for 'cultural capital' with a heavy use of irony

### **Irony and ambiguity**

Home's use of irony is often ambiguous, the more to contribute to the 'wind up' - a derisive stance to those unable to ascertain whether his assertions are ironic parody or serious. In his magazine *Smile*, produced during the 1980s, Home writes:

'There is no other ideology as reactionary as ecology, as the idea that we shouldn't wipe rain forest from the earth's terrain, that we shouldn't build nuclear reactors...' (*Smile* 9, mid-1980s p.1)

Home insists that this was 'satire, a parody of the kind of sweeping generalisations made in situationist texts' and argues

'If you really believe in something you should be able to articulate a reasonable argument against it; if someone can only imagine taking a single line on an issue then that indicates they're only dealing with it on an emotional level and haven't come to grips with the subject intellectually.' (Home interviewed by Goaman *Variant* 7 p.21)

The logic in this argument is itself ambiguous, and can be interpreted as revealing more about the emotional drive in Home's project towards relentless provocation through irony and satire, and Home's furious desire to seek revenge in print.

Home's interventions appear to act as an outlet for stored up resentment, but the relentlessness of his feuds and provocations and hoaxes suggest that the satisfaction he derives from these acts is transitory and he is compelled to repeat the acts. Home himself is aware of the source of his motivations, as discussed above and when he says, in the context of his liking for representations of violence in his work, particularly in his fiction:

'I'm very aware that I've a chip on my shoulder, the important thing for me is to direct my hatred against all the wankers who told me I was nothing because I went to school on a GLC [Greater London Council] overspill estate. The idea of peace and love and everybody holding hands is a complete anathema to me' (ibid p.23)

The repetition of attitudes, and the exploitation of these for self-promotional purposes in Home's interventions, is alluded to by Mike Peters in *Her and Now* (see Chapter 8). Peters in a

discussion of the impact of the writing of Guy Debord, sees an infantilism engendered by capitalism as at work:

'Only those who succeed in growing up have more of a future than such overgrown "lost children" as Malcolm McLaren or Stewart Home who demonstrably have nothing new to say, and find themselves having to make a (more or less profitable) living acting out adolescent attitudes they can by now barely remember. Capital will do everything to perpetuate the infantilism on which it now depends.' ( *Here and Now* (Guy Debord Supplement) 1994 p.iii).

## Conclusions

*Vague's* fanzine approach to oppositional and transgressive material, which avoids critical evaluation from Vague as writer, compiler and editor, and Home's provocational irony, are in contrast to other interventions discussed in this thesis - from the academic discursive format of *Here and Now*, the utopian rhetoric and rants of *Anti Clock-wise* and *No* and the broader scope and commitment to dialogue which will emerge from my discussion which follows on the US periodicals *Anarchy* and *Fifth Estate*.

Those discussed in other chapters potentially seek a universal audience for their oppositional perspectives, even if the audience is limited either by the relatively small number of people open to radical ideas, or by unintentional characteristics of their projects, such as the academicism of *Here and Now*. In the case of Home and Vague's projects, they are aimed at a particular sphere of cultural currency, and as such can be analysed in terms of a postmodern retreat from universals into more particularist markets. Vague, in its celebratory uncritical presentation of oppositional material, holds on to affirmative transformatory ideas and therefore potentially retains a project of communicating an oppositional attitude, even though the style is directed at a particular marginal popular cultural sphere and identity. Home's use of irony and parody, and his refusal of affirmative alternative visions, represents a more decisive retreat from universals. His continuous provocational stance incites another inward turn, into the realm of personal feuds with others in pro-Situ or other radical milieus such as those concerned with anti-fascism or with *Green Anarchist* magazine.

The way in which Vague draws on popular cultural styles, on the other hand, potentially allows wider audiences to encounter oppositional ideas in forms which are accessible and intersect with cultural interests which overlap with pleasurable tastes (to use here a division between politics as 'boring', high culture as 'effort' and popular culture as 'entertainment'). One of the ways the material intersects with popular culture is the focus on sensational material popularly covered by tabloid newspapers, from crime to terrorism. As interpreted in the discussed above, the sphere of evil is inverted in *Vague* whereas for tabloid newspapers, figures such as Carlos the Jackal and Charles Manson are evil, in *Vague* this is inverted the world is evil and such figures are interesting because they epitomise its horrors, and attack the world

Home's tendency to attack projects and milieux broadly in the same anarchistic sphere as his own, rather than attacking the world to which such milieux are opposed, makes for an ironic and critical parodic style that could be confusing to its audience, despite its overlap with popular culture.

Both Vague and Home's projects mine a particular seam deriving from the Situationists – with the use of slogans and the lavish use of visuals. The photograph of two bottles turned into molotov cocktails on a window ledge, also used in English Situationist Gray's book *Leaving the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, appears on the covers of both *Vague* and *Smile*, and forms an illustration of the attraction to aesthetic images of revolt and of the past as inspirational.

In common with my discovery about Turner and the contrast between the confrontational rhetoric and the friendly person behind it, I found both Vague and Home to be sociable, likeable and friendly, in contrast to the notes of rage and ironic rhetoric that characterise their projects. There are however notes of humour and playfulness in all their interventions, that reveal something of the warmth and love of fun and playfulness which forms an aspect of their personalities.

Vague's communications in his magazine are comparable to Turner's (Chapter 7) in that both use a personal direct and often conversational style, which draws on the 'fanzine' tradition. This is particularly evident in the discussion above of Vague's philosophy of living '...Keep up the football...Watch TV a lot...Work as little as possible (Not at all at proper jobs)...Always have short spikey hair and wear as much black as possible...Read some books but get junk pop mags to keep your hatred sharp... ...Avoid weirdos.' (*Vague* 23 p. 57). Such an engaging personal communication also shows the humour which both Vague's and Turner's projects have in common, and this reflects the Situationist commitment to fun, pleasure and play.

In Home's early work, there are suggestions of utopian leanings underpinning his position. For example, he defines the utopian current, of which he sees his interventions as a part, as aiming not just at the integration of art and life but of all human activities, and as having a critique of social separation and a concept of totality. (Home 1988 pp.5, 6). And in his manifesto for his one-person Art Strike 1990-1993, Home wrote in a critique of the notion of 'artist': 'to call one person an artist is to deny another the equal gift of vision. -and thus the myth of "genius" becomes an ideological justification for inequality, repression and famine.' (flyer 1990) His subsequent interventions begin to lose the communication, which breaks through sporadically in his earlier work, of a radical critique of the totality. His underlying attraction to such a critique is lost within a web of irony, parody and vituperative feuds with others, and studied contempt for those less in the 'know' than he himself

## Chapter 10

### Anarchy in the USA

Radical, anarchist and post-Situationist currents in Britain intersect with those in America, forming a network that allows cross currents of influence and debate. The two most influential and long established anarchist periodicals from the USA are *Anarchy* and *Fifth Estate*, both of which are distributed in the UK, and are held in regard by many of those who read them, for their breadth of material and long sustained publication. Intersections and networks are enabled by the listings and reviews published by anarchist periodicals of others in anarchistic currents, including those from the opposite side of the Atlantic and other parts of the world. One listing cites *Anarchy* as:

'Extremely professional and impressive newspaper...one of the best anarchist publications around...The content is a mixture of green(y) anarchism, bits of situationist ranting and general anti-authoritarian views. It really is a shame that no-one in this country has the resources, desire or impetus to produce literature of this quality on a regular basis.' (Turner in *Ann Clock-wise* issue 13)

The commitment shown by the relatively small milieu in the US is the more remarkable in view of the immense geographical distances separating pockets of anarchistic activity (for example Columbia, Missouri to Detroit, New York to San Francisco and Berkeley, California). Some letters to *Anarchy* note the experience of being separated by distance from like-minded people. A periodical such as *Anarchy*, with the potential to reach across state and national boundaries, can act as a vector of ideas and a means of creating a sense of community of like-minded people. One reader writes 'Where have you been all my life?'. Another comments on his surprise that such a periodical could originate from a relatively small city, Columbia, in the mid-Western state of Missouri, writing

'I never would have thought Columbia, MO, had such folks as yourselves' (*Anarchy* 18 March-April 1989 p 27)

A resident of California writes of the sense of isolation in a suburb of Los Angeles:

'Hello out there from an isolated and depressed young anarchist! I'm writing this from a suburb of Hell, I mean Los Angeles, and you would (probably not) be surprised how isolated you can be here in a "center of western culture". Anyway, I really enjoy your mag, never even heard about it until you sent me a free copy(?)'. ' (*Anarchy* 18 1989 p 27)

#### The origins of *Anarchy*

The magazine *Anarchy: a journal of desire armed* was begun by a collective of several people in Columbia, Missouri. Starting as a four-page 'street sheet', it developed through the 1980s into



# ANARCHY

a journal of  
DESIRE ARMED

Issue #17

DISARM AUTHORITY! ARM YOUR DESIRES!

Fall/Winter 1988-89

Newsstand  
price:

\$1.50



Isol  
Pembalce  
+ lev  
EXCHAS  
all x  
Ply  
X  
lev  
review of  
Zerzan  
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+ last  
Zerzan's  
work  
@ x relig  
continued  
p. 15  
inc.  
letters.

## "Professions of the Papalagi"

John Zerzan on "Who Killed Ned Ludd?"

Lone Wolf Circles on "The Freedom of Biocentrism"

Feral Faun on "The Quest for the Spiritual"

"Stumps Suck! on the Okanogan" by Mikal Jakubal...."Chaos and Anarchy" by Kansas Slim...."Why Working Girls Doesn't Work" by Bill Blank....Discussion on "Anarchy & Religion"



an increasingly well produced periodical with 36 to 82 pages, and a circulation of several thousand, financed entirely through donations and subscriptions, with no advertising and no paid staff, in the self-sustained manner characteristic of anarchist projects.

During the 1980s the Columbia group intersected with other local projects from a Community Radio station to housing collectives to a local food co-operative, and distributed 500-1000 copies of the magazine locally to people who seek it out at a few locations where businesses allowed this (letter from Lev Chernyi 16.10.1989).

By the 1990s there was only one remaining member local to Columbia of the group publishing *Anarchy* magazine, since all the others either moved away or stopped participating in the group for personal reasons. The one remaining member has continued to sustain the project for over 20 years, with the support of editorial advisory groups and contributing editors of changing composition.

The editor who has sustained the project wrote initially under the pen name of 'Lev Chernyi', the name of a Russian anarchist, and from 1992 under the name of Jason McQuinn; the change of pen name indicates a move away from traditionalist anarchist associations. He started his own investigations into anarchy while still at high school, at the St Louis County Public Library and later the University of Missouri Library, where he found back issues of the British journal *Anarchy* (published in the 1960s) and *Freedom* (a long-established British periodical).

McQuinn studied philosophy at university, and continues to draw on the philosophical tradition in his own formulation of radical phenomenology, which he gently propounds in his own articles, in debates and in responses to other contributors and readers' letters, as will emerge in this chapter. The position he takes up as part of a radical phenomenological perspective argues against abstractions and concepts deriving from discourses, ideologies and religious mystifications, which are seen as resulting in the individual surrendering, to a higher authority, their capacity to think for themselves. In this perspective, subjectivity is seen as the starting point for developing liberatory theory. His perspectives are set out in his article on 'Critical Theory', and in the debate on Anarchy and the Sacred, which are discussed below.

McQuinn continues to live in Columbia, Missouri, though during the late 1990s he resided temporarily in Denver, Colorado, and in San Francisco, with the purpose of forming more collaborative editorial associations to sustain *Anarchy*. Though these collaborations were short lived, some of those in the San Francisco Bay area, particularly Lawrence Jarach, continue to contribute much to the magazine (Letter from McQuinn 19.00). McQuinn finds that, though there is more going on in San Francisco, there is more time to work and relax in Columbia (email 9.5.00).

In the early 1990s, he launched, initially with others, a 'starter' paper to *Anarchy*, aimed at a wider audience and entitled *Alternative Press Review*. By 1994, he was left attempting to publish two magazines with only intermittent help from anyone locally, which, he says, was 'something I never intended to do'. His attempts during the mid-1990s to transfer *Anarchy* to a

group in New York failed after two issues (41 and 42), and there was an additional problem when the magazine's largest wholesale distributor (Fine Print Distributors) went bankrupt, owing both magazines thousands of dollars (a net loss of \$13,000, a debt which continues to drain the projects in 2001). *Alternative Press Review* was successfully transferred to a collective in Arlington, Virginia at the end of 1998, and McQuinn continues to work closely with them.

This history of efforts to sustain both publications, with one failed and one successful attempt to transfer the magazine to collectives in other cities, indicates that it is only with concerted effort that projects can be sustained via collaborative efforts. There are relatively small numbers of people locally willing to participate on a project, and consequently collaborations need to be sought in other regions. Some of those who have collaborated on the production of the two magazines still continue to contribute in terms of writing and editorial support (letter from McQuinn 1.9.2000).

The support of a network of contributors, changing in composition over the years, sustains the project even if ultimately one person, McQuinn, is instrumental in ensuring its continuation. Changes in the names of those involved reflect shifts in oppositional identities. For example, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, many of the names of regular contributors expressed either a subversive status (e.g. A. Hacker, Badguy); an environmental note (Shagbark Hickory); or a return to nature theme as in the names (Feral Faun, Feral Ranter, Morgan Feralchilde), using the word 'feral' to denote a tamed or domesticated animal which has reverted to the wild, evoking the sense of a person freed from repression and domestication and returning to the wild. By the late 1990s, straightforward names predominated amongst contributing editors, reflecting perhaps a desire above all to be taken seriously in wider circles.

### Readers and letters

The letters pages of *Anarchy* are fairly extensive, occupying about a quarter of the magazine during the late 1980s, to a fifth by 2000. There is an explicit intention to create a dialectical interaction between editors, contributors and readers in the search for anti-authoritarian perspectives, and this indicates a commitment to a dialogic form.

'*Anarchy* maintains one of the most open letters columns you'll find anywhere. We are committed to maintaining a dialogue with our readers, whether they are supporters or not. And while our responses may not pull any punches, we are open to both the rational and emotional appeals of our critics. You may not always like what we have to say, but we sure won't stop you from telling us and our readers why!' (15, Winter 1988 p 7)

'Tired of being told what to do, how to feel, and what to think? Discover and explore the world of anarchy. We don't claim to have any final 'answers' to the question of how we can create a genuinely free and satisfying social world, but we'd like to search for them with you' (25, Summer 1990, p 7 of NAAR insert)

The letters consist partly of high level debate often sparked off by previous articles. These include letters written by a network of contributors and other individuals, some known to the editors, who are well versed in theoretical discussion and prominent in the anarchist movement. The most active editor, Lev Chernyi, frequently includes a response (headed 'Lev responds'), particularly to perspectives that differ from his own. The letters also include those from newer readers who may write expressing enthusiasm and asking questions about anarchist perspectives. To these, Chernyi's response ('Lev responds') is to recommend specific books such as those by anarchist Paul Goodman.

The interaction, through print, exploring ideas of anarchy, maintains the commitment to developing them through dialogue, though the main editor, Lev Chernyi, has the means of responding and potentially can always have the 'final word'. This does not go unnoticed, and one protagonist erupts in frustration against this tendency of Chernyi. In a debate, on anthropocentrism versus biocentrism (see below and Chapter 11) and on theory versus activism, Chernyi argues during the dialogue for a meshing and combining of these polarised positions. One protagonist in the debate, under the name 'Lone Wolf Circles', takes the position of arguing for the sacred, for biocentrism, and for practice over theory. He accuses Chernyi of having the last word with his postscript format, 'pontificating' from his 'safely ensconced' position as editor, acting the academic and theorising from the soapbox:

'You, in your studious pursuit of liberation, suffer the domination of a ceaseless commentator, a flippant objectifier, the ultimate dogmatic despot: your own "rational" mind. Leave this dictator at home with your shoes sometime, and take a walk in the woods.' (25 Summer 1990, p.35)

Chernyi's reply is a measured response to the vituperative note voiced in Lone Wolf Circles' criticism. Chernyi argues for as much critical theory as action to live more wildly and freely, and expresses amazement at the resentment by so many radicals towards critical thinking. Chernyi states that he is not interested in 'playing other people's manipulative games'. (ibid.)

### **Critical theory as propounded in Anarchy**

Lev Chernyi visited Britain in the summer of 1994, and we met up for a meal at my house, followed by a meeting in a pub to which I asked one person to network the information by phone<sup>1</sup>. A dozen people came to meet Chernyi, including the organiser of the Anarchist Book Fair, the editorial group of *Open Eye* magazine, and several people involved in organising the then forthcoming Anarchy in the UK festival - one of whom was a Canadian postgraduate registered at the London School of Economics to write a thesis on longterm backpackers.

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<sup>1</sup> Since some of those I contacted were on holiday, I succeeded in contacting only one person directly. That he was able to relay the information about the meeting with Lev Chernyi, the editor of *Anarchy*, sufficiently to draw a dozen people to the meeting attests to the high level of networking between circles in the milieu, and also to the interest that Chernyi's visit aroused.

During conversation with me, Lev Chernyi cited some key influences on his ideas, including Paul Goodman's work on gestalt therapy and Husserlian phenomenology. These are only occasionally made explicit in his writings in *Anarchy*. Chernyi's dialectical phenomenological perspective is nonetheless much in evidence in the magazine, because of the dialogic approach which tends to be dotted with a 'Lev responds' or a postscript from Lev Chernyi. This will emerge from the debates on anarchy and the sacred, which are discussed below.

The clearest articulation of Chernyi's ideas is in his article 'An Introduction to Critical Theory' (*Anarchy* 18 March-April 1989 pp 14-16). The article alludes to 'radical phenomenology' as the philosophical basis of critical theory, and explicates some philosophical abstractions relevant to phenomenological discourse, such as ontological dualism and 'Being'. Chernyi points out that his notion of 'Critical Theory' differs from that of the Frankfurt School which has 'unfortunately become overly identified in some people's thinking with the idea of critical theory per se' (ibid. p 14).

The article is headed by a large cartoon strip based on the popular American comic strip 'Peanuts'. One character is in conversation with another about what Critical Theory is: Lucy: 'Theory is inseparable from human life. Whether we are conscious of it or not, every act is an expression of theory...As long as we continue to conceive the world in terms of bankrupt categories of *hierarchy* and *commodity exchange* we will remain at the mercy of forces we can neither understand nor change.'

Charlie Brown: 'So *critical theory* allows us to begin to grasp our world concretely by situating ourselves within the totality and locating the fulcrums of change.' (ibid.)

The use of the comic strip acts as a form of Situationist-style 'detournement', inserting radical theory into the 'Peanuts' cartoon whose humour centres on interpersonal situations. The purpose appears to be a didactic one, intended to engage interest and capture an outline of the ideas in a popular cultural, visual and more palatable form.

The text is a carefully explicated one, distinguished only from the conventional academic format by its engagement with providing a theory by which 'we can collectively grasp our real conditions as they are lived and bring about transformation. As such it is a clear theoretical argument rather than the 'critical art of rhetoric' of Situationist texts (see Chapter 4). Nonetheless the influence of Situationist ideas is evident.

Chernyi introduces the notion that authentic engagement in the social world must 'begin with the subjective', which corresponds to Situationist Vaneigem's stress on subjectivity as the source of critique and transformation. Chernyi argues that 'any genuinely revolutionary theory must be at the same time self-theory - a theory of how to live everyday, of how to struggle with the reigning structures of misery and their deceptive appearances' (p 15)

I will summarise the article as follows

The practical and the theoretical are seen as intertwined and the key concepts presented as necessary for this theory are not new but need to be rediscovered and reinvented in order to construct a living vocabulary of shared concepts with which we can collectively grasp our real conditions as they are lived.

Theory seems alien for most people because for all of us 'theory' has usually meant having our thinking done *for* us by ideologues, and authorities - by parents, priests, teachers, bosses, politicians, 'experts', counsellors etc.

As a result we often appropriate, as if it were our own thought, an explicit and formal *ideology* (or fragments of various ideologies) we 'believe' in. Without realising, human beings consent to being taken over and used as the tools of God, or Progress, or Historical Necessity, or the Market, Authority, Democracy, the Dollar etc. In our era, ideology nearly always constitutes a theoretical acceptance at some level of the *logic of capital* - the alienation of our life-activity through its conversion to commodities which are bought and sold within a hierarchical social system.

The first step is that alienation must be perceived and understood; everyone must become his or her theoretician. We must criticise all thought ruthlessly, especially our own. Instead of allowing the reference point for our lives to always be somewhere else, we must become the conscious centers of our own self-theories.

Once all the layers of ideological mystification are peeled off, we are laid bare to ourselves, and our relations to other people and to the universe can be made progressively more transparent. We can then see that all the unnecessary and mystifying abstractions were only projections of our own individual and social powers, our own alienated powers and the powers of other people just like us. This abstraction is the projection of the real domination of the individual subject by capital onto the realm of myth, metaphor, or superstition. The only really critical theory exists where no morals, abstract ideals, or hidden constraints cloud the air. (*Anarchy* 18 March-April 1989 pp. 14-16)

The theoretical influences underpinning Chernyi's argument range from anarchism (the critique of hierarchy, authority and power), the Situationist stress on subjectivity, phenomenology (emphasis on self, experience and 'life-activity'), and Marxism (dialectics and commodity fetishism). The article, while academic in presentation, also evokes a call to connectedness and a common basis with which to communicate, understand and act - expressed in, for example, 'living vocabulary', 'shared concepts' and 'collectively grasp'. In tandem with this goes the writer's desire (as is the case in all articles) to influence others in the milieu and to promote his own perspectives.

I want briefly to note a problem with Chernyi's faith in the capacity of individuals to peel away ideology and make transparent their own relationship to the world - this assumes that this can be done on a cognitive and intellectual and ultimately rational level (and this may have been

one element which provoked Lone Wolf Circles' criticisms of Chernyi responses (see above)). What it neglects is the emotional level identified by Christopher Gray (see Chapter 6) in his critique of the Situationists. The process by which individuals are absorbed into existing ideologies is intertwined with distress patterns and emotional suffering. This emotional distress needs addressing through a process of healing, *in tandem* with the processes of understanding the objective conditions in which ideologies take a hold. Chernyi holds the belief, widespread in anarchism and with strong links to a modernist belief in rationality, that individuals can intellectually comprehend the ideological and structural forces that alienate and exploit them.

Chernyi's dialectical phenomenological critical theory is expounded in dialogue with a large network of others. This is illustrated in the debate which is summarised below on anarchy, religion and the sacred.

### **Anarchy, religion, the sacred and the symbolic**

The debates which appear in *Anarchy*, sometimes overlapping with those in *Fifth Estate*, continue for several issues; this debate on the sacred continued over several years. Such debates are important for my purposes here for a number of reasons. For the purposes of ethnographic understanding, they, firstly, form a means of understanding the engagement, through writing and print, of a network of individuals connected by a common project of developing perspectives on transforming the world.

Second, the debates are important also in showing the extent of engagement with deeper issues central to the creation of radical transformatory theory - in this case, religious, spiritual and sacred elements and the question of whether these should be incorporated into radical theory and practice or, as in Chernyi's perspective, need to be criticised as aspects of thought which has as its reference point a higher authority to the individual. Those entering the debate draw on knowledge of the past - in terms of primitive, animistic cosmological systems and organised religion - in order to explicate different perspectives.

And, finally, the debate reveals the extent to which such discussions emerge out of developments in the wider spectrum of contemporary culture (in this case, the emergence of 'new age' perspectives). It illustrates also how radicals seek to incorporate such elements or, with a more didactic purpose, attempt to redirect manifestations which are seen as counterproductive, reactionary, inward-turning or irrelevant.

#### *New Age' currents as a background to the debate*

During the 1980s, as orthodox left politics began to wane, there was a growing interest in the Western world in holism and other connected strands of alternative therapies, self-help or self-development currents, and 'New Age' leanings towards mysticism, spirituality, primitive

religions and Eastern philosophies in the search for a spiritual dimension (quickly becoming a fast-growing market, as part of consumer capitalism's search for novelty, for New Age commodities from books to candles). These holistic and spiritual influences have roots in the 1960s counterculture, though their development during the 1980s and 1990s is perceived by those in more radical currents to indicate an apolitical turn, allowing these strands to become centred on the self and personal change, with a turning away from a critique of social, political and economic conditions (see the article by Jim McFarlane in *Here and Now* discussed in Chapter 8).

Anarchist currents in both the UK and USA intersect with wider contemporary developments, and the holistic/spiritual turn to New Age phenomena gained influence in anarchism. This was evident particularly in the shifts in focus at the regional and North American anarchist gatherings which had been held intermittently in different states from the 1970s through to the 1990s. One influential US writer in the sphere of anarchic spirituality is Starhawk, an anarcho-feminist whose writings advocate a fusion of spiritualism, magic, ritual and anarchy to transform consciousness therapeutically (1979, 1982, 1987, 1993) (see also discussion in Chapter 12). In Britain, one writer who explores a similar vein is John Moore, who advocates a culture of resistance which draws on radical spirituality, myth, ritual and folklore in a resurgence of a sacred relation with the earth and a mystical bioregional sense of place (1988, 1991; personal communication April 1990).

The debate on anarchy and the sacred, summarised below, was sparked off by a report on the 1987 Minneapolis anarchist gathering (*Fifth Estate (FE)* Summer 1987), leading to exchanges of letters in *FE* (Spring 1988 to Summer 1989), and involving some of the same writers who later participate in the debate in *Anarchy*.

The sense of prominent individuals in the anarchist movement participating in the debate in the forum of print is evident since Chernyi, editor of *Anarchy*, is one of those who writes to *Fifth Estate*. Chernyi argues that

'There's no compelling reason that I can see for uncritically accepting what I can only describe as the "ideology" of certain primitive societies. As far as I can guess the sacred seems to be the conceptual seed of civilization. Why continue to cultivate it?'

Feral Faun argues against a previous argument made by 'Lone Wolf Circles', who had seen the extension of the sacred to everything as the basis for a radical ecological viewpoint. Faun points out that the Judaeo-Christian concept that humans were sacred and above all other beings, was one of the main ideological justifications for the rape of the earth. The concept of the sacred played a major role in the development of property and exchange, authority, work, agriculture and is therefore 'a major source of this alienated civilization'. Faun concludes that

'It cannot be an abstraction like "sacredness" which motivates our defence of the earth, but our own very real, personal love for the natural wild beings we interact with.' *Fifth Estate* Summer 89 p.18)

Meantime, over at *Anarchy*, Chernyi as the main editor has begun putting together an issue of *Anarchy* with the theme of anarchy and religion. In line with the magazine's commitment to dialogue, this issue contains six letters exchanged between Chernyi and another prominent anarchist, Jay Kinney, editor and illustrator of comics such as *Anarchy*, together with four other articles: two by Chernyi himself; and other articles by Ken Knabb, pro-Situ editor of the Situationist anthology, and Fred Woodworth, editor since the 1960s of the more mainstream anarchist magazine *The Match*!. The debate begins in issue 15 (Winter 1988) and continues to issue 25 (Summer 1990).

I will summarise key points in the debate issue by issue, in order to explicate the spectrum of perspectives on the role of the sacred in the project of transformation, to highlight the use of the past in a context of dialogue, and to convey the extent to which the dialogue intersects with contemporary issues (in this case, the emergence of the 'new age' scene.

#### **Anarchy 15 Winter 1988**

Ken Knabb, pro-Situ, Berkeley, California:

The revolutionary movement must oppose religion, but not by opposing to it a vulgar amorality or philistine common sense. It should be able to show itself as the terrain of the most coherent expression of compassion, keeping the trenchancy of the situationists but with a magnanimity and humility that leaves aside their uninteresting ego games. Nonviolent religious or humanistic radical movements should be evaluated for their affirmation of an albeit alienated humanity and for their remarkable success and practice of community which puts other radical milieus to shame

Fred Woodworth, Tucson, Arizona, editor of anarchist paper *The Match*

Religion is on an equal footing with government in the oppression of human beings. An anarchist movement allied with religious persons may as well be one allied with landlords, capitalists, police and the state itself (p 16 and 18)

Jay Kinney, of *Anarchy Comics*, San Francisco:

Anarchists who hold to a narrow sectarian definition of political and spiritual correctness risk alienation from their own deepest needs and desires. For a healthy relationship with the whole of life, the 'whole' need not be defined as a deity, either immanent or transcendent - it can be understood as Gaia, Mother Nature, the Void, the Ecosystem, Life, the Universe, etc. The



crosscultural outcroppings of myth and ritual are heartening signs of human creative imagination confronting the unknown. (p.19)

Chernyi

Kinney's perspectives are similar to New Age ones and, as Woodworth says, they are liberal. Anarchy and religion are essentially incompatible. (p.20)

Exchanges of letters between Chernyi and Kinney

Chernyi

The use of the concepts of 'god' or 'spirit' is not necessarily authoritarian or mystifying as long as they do not signify more than 'metaphors - as long as they are not taken literally and are treated as concepts in a conscious manner. The reality of our situation is that almost no one understands the ideas of 'god' and 'spirit' in non-ideological and non-reifying ways.

I [Chernyi] have studied Taoism, Zen and Tai chi but nonetheless feel uncomfortable when participating in group activities that possess religious overtones because I know that in most cases the people involved are surrendering their own abilities to think and center themselves in their actually experienced world in favor of ready-made reified frameworks of thinking through which they are reduced in some sense to objects in an abstract world. They deny the reality of their experiences to the degree that they impose an abstract spiritual interpretation on them that they mistake as being more real (p.20)

Kinney.

The problem in looking to a logical rationale for one's actions by drawing on one's own experience can be illustrated by a few anti-authoritarians I can think of who have a brilliant rap and rationale but the emotional maturity of a two year old. I'd sooner trust a conservative with a good heart than an anarchist without an iota of compassion or mercy. The latter can contrive politically correct rationales for anonymous violence, shoplifting from anarchist bookstores, slandering comrades etc, while the individual who listens to his heart is often more likely to actually help change things for the better (p 22)

*Anarchy* 17 Fall/Winter 1988-89

In 7, other prominent anarchists enter the debate, including Feral Faun (already encountered in Chapter 7 as contributing to a debate in *Anti Clock-wise*) and Bob Brubaker, a contributor to *Anarchy* and *Fifth Estate* (see Chapter 11), and 'Tundra Wind'. Chernyi recaps on the debate and states his desire for it to move 'beyond bankrupt posturing' between religion versus atheism

Chernyi

It's time we embarked on our own voyages of genuine self-reflection and self-discovery...the lumbering religious and atheist orthodoxies hide the more genuine struggles between frozen, reified, ideological thought and our impulses to live freely and fully. (p 20)

Feral Faun

Ultimately religion fails to meet 'spiritual' needs Religion claims to give us back the freedom, the creativity, the passionate fullness of life that was stolen from us, but, in fact, religion is part of the conspiracy to keep this fullness from us. In relegating creativity, passion, freedom and ecstasy to the realm of the spiritual, religion safely takes them out of the realm of daily life and puts them in their 'proper' place where they cannot become a threat to civilization - the realm of ritual and ceremony.' (p.21)

Chernyi, in a response to 'Tundra Wind':

Religion as it is usually conceived is a dualistic conception in which the world is split into two ontologically separate realms, whether these be dualities of Sacred and Profane, or of Spirit and Matter. (p.24)

B.B. (Bob Brubaker), living at the time in Japan:

I agree with Chernyi that the division of the world into sacred and profane realism leads to a devaluation of everyday life and the hierarchical elevation of the spiritual domain This may not be true of all religions - such as the animist spirituality of tribal peoples in which the world, nature, and our bodies are all sacred and part of the symbolic interplay of life.

If a dialectical phenomenologist (referring to Chernyi's perspective) were able to convince the Hopis of the superiority of his interpretation of nature over theirs, what then would become of the experience (of rocks, animals and other elements as sentient beings) itself?

While religious experience is a surrender to the experience itself, dialectical phenomenology is analysis, argumentation, systematic doubt. We should at the very least recognize that intellectualization is still a sublimation, a *substitute* for direct experience (albeit a necessary one at a time when all experience is distorted, deformed, mediated by hierarchical power).

Jacques Camatte, in *The Wandering of Humanity*, wrote that the theoretical act is insufficient in Camatte's words, theory can call for the reconciliation of senses and brain, but it remains within the boundaries of this separation What must be affirmed is the whole of life (p.24)

Chernyi

Can't you see that, though this reification of experience of animistic tribal peoples may be less developed (and thus less immediately pernicious) in the lives of tribal peoples, it still remains a reification of experience nonetheless. (p 24)

Possibly the difference in our perspectives here may lie in that I see the reconciliation of our present social alienation from our selves, from each other, and from 'Nature' as being located on an *experiential* level, while you seem to hold out some hope that a *symbolic* reconciliation may be sufficient. I can only view a pure symbolic reconciliation as a counterfeit substitution for an actually-lived reconciliation. A symbolic reconciliation can only be a symptom of an actually-lived alienation, since an actual reconciliation would eliminate any felt need for symbolic (and essentially empty) substitutes.

Conceptual systems which fetishize an abstract 'holism' are subject to the same critiques made of religion and the sacred.

The point about intellectualization is relevant too to primitive symbolic interplay which is a form of intellectualized solution to a much deeper problem.

The quote from Camatte is ironic because I see it as saying almost exactly what I've been saying, in maintaining the primacy of lived experience, refusing to invest belief in any concept.

I argue for a *suspension of all belief in the symbolic* : personally I believe in nothing because I value my lived experiences more than I value any categories of interpretation. I refuse to invest any concepts - whether they be religious, scientific, revolutionary or anarchistic - with any sort of absolute belief. I'll use them to attempt descriptions of my experience...For me *a suspension of all belief in the symbolic* is an absolutely necessary precondition for any genuine reconciliation of our social alienation. Our lives are not just symbols. (p.25)

NB. A *Fifth Estate* writer, George Bradford, responds to the rejection of the symbolic made by John Zerzan (see Chapter 11). I include it here because, though Zerzan's rejection of the symbolic goes further than that made by Chernyi (Zerzan's encompassing language, art etc), Bradford's critique highlights an important point that symbolism and language are aspects intrinsic to our species. Bradford writes.

'not only have symbolic activity and language coevolved with our very physiological make-up, symbolism is deeply rooted in evolution and practised by other species (Alienated wolves and whales, perhaps?)' (*Fifth Estate* Vol 26 no 2 337 Late Summer 1991 pp.21-22)

### **Anarchy 25 Summer 1990**

John Zerzan, writer on primitivism Eugene, Oregon. Responding to a point made by Dogbane Champion, a writer (also under the name George Bradford), for *Fifth Estate*, who has contributed to the dialogue in *Anarchy*

[Zerzan argues] Champion idealises earlier societies and appears to see symbolic religious spheres as the first means by which specialisms arose. He sees the shaman as the first specialist, representing a backward step from an earlier wholeness based on absence of division of labour.

Specialisms and inequalities are rooted not in symbolic religious spheres but in divisions of labour, social relations and the relationship to the land and exist in gathering-hunting societies as well as those based on domestication. (p.29)

Alice Carnes, anthropologist, (co-editor of a book *Questioning Technology* with Zerzan), Eugene, Oregon (Carnes is also the partner of Zerzan)

Chernyi is right to reject Dogbane Campion's veneration of what Joseph Campbell called 'the numinous' - the capacity for awe and wonder, since is difficult to distinguish from habits of fearfulness and submission. Chernyi and Campion could however recognise the philosophy that humans are not central to life, but are just one life form

Whatever the varied religious, political and social forms taken by preliterate or traditional cultures, few that I know of succeeded in trashing the environment and depleting resources needed for human life as effectively as literate civilised groups have done (p 29)

Chernyi responds to Carnes:

Feelings of awe and wonder and poetic metaphorical expression can be experienced without ascribing these to any sort of reified conceptions of 'spiritual', 'supernatural' or 'scientific' authors or causes.

While there is no need to raise human life, or any other reified conceptions of humanity above the rest of the world, the ideologies of deep ecologist and biocentrists who propound these views talk down from their pulpits in the name of Nature (or Gaia or God), preaching submission to their interpretations of whichever holy scriptures they venerate.

Once this point is clarified about the need to reject metaphysical, religious or scientific principles which demand our submission, I want to state my great affinity for non-religious animist perspectives and the value of expressing appreciation for the natural gifts which sustain our lives. (p.30)

Feral Faun, San Francisco:

Taking issue with Dogbane Campion's defence of the sacred Campion's equation of desacralizing phenomena with degrading the world into energy and resources is misplaced. Sacred ritual is equally a psychological technology for using the resource of 'spiritual' energy in things. Ritual is work, productive activity. Just examine any ritual: unlike play, ritual has a purpose and end for which it aims, and in this it is similar to work and production. Campion's argument can be turned round: rather than desacralizing being equated with degrading the earth, making something sacred degrades it into energy and resources.

Campion's argument is based on a fetishization of the primitive. I desire something new, something which, to my knowledge, has never existed. And I certainly desire no sacredness in the world I envision.

Anarchic rebels of the past have recognised that sacredness was the basis for all authority and the present tendency of certain radicals to wed anarchic rebellion to the sacred is a step backwards. The sacred tries to define our lives for us and therefore needs to be destroyed (p 31)

## **The significance of the debate**

This debate ran for two years in the pages of *Anarchy*, with contributors fielding their own perspectives on whether concepts of sacredness and spirituality have a place in a radical transformatory project, and, if they can be reconciled, on what grounds. The discussion then is not merely an academic one on an abstract plane, but one deemed essential to clarify in the path to transformation. One means of developing perspectives involves drawing on the past - on the history of human society and anthropological knowledge. This relationship to the past, and use of historical and anthropological knowledge, allows protagonists in the debate to gauge what is of value to a freer human existence (for example whether feelings of awe and wonder can be experienced without losing these to a higher authority of the sacred, God, Gaia etc), and whether the sacred and the symbolic are intrinsically connected with the roots of inequality and civilised/state society.

While it appears that few contributors change their position as a result of the exchanges, each draws the other to evaluate and clarify further their own perspectives.

This process also allows a common bond and sense of community to be constituted further, between individuals residing thousands of miles from each other. The debate is sparked by a report on a social gathering in a more face-to-face situation, and by the influence of New Age interests in wider circles. The forum of the printed periodical affords a means by which those already linked by a network of prominent persons known to each other exchange, *in writing*, views on the place of the sacred and spirituality.

Another role taken by writing and print in this process is in constituting the network of persons and the positions of prominence in which a person becomes known to other like-minded people. Many of the protagonists involved in the debate will have come to know of each other through their own acts of writing and publishing. While individuals may seek a form of cultural capital, through mutual recognition, by intervening in the debate, this is not a salient factor in the motivation. This in contrast to the more competitive games of one-upmanship played out in the milieux around some pro-Situs and Stewart Home (see chapters 6, 9).

## **The Situationist influence: Anarchy as post-Situationist**

The Situationist influence in *Anarchy* is clearly detectable and forms another aspect of the way in which the project relates to the past as a resource from which to learn and evaluate theory and practice. The subtitle of the magazine, 'a journal of desire armed', can be linked to Situationist slogans, as can the slogan 'Disarm authority! Arm your desires!' which appears on the front page during the 1980s.

One article which appears in the issue devoted to Anarchy and Religion (issue 15 Winter 1988) is by Ken Knabb, editor of the anthology of Situationist writings (Knabb 1981). An introduction to the article by Chernyi is of interest in characterising further the pro-Situationist milieu in the USA (see also Chapter 6). Chernyi situates Knabb as the 'situationist insider', which has the inevitable result that

'for the rest of us, the language of Knabb's essay must be allowed to filter through our perspectives as *outsiders* to the situationist project' (15 p 12)

Chernyi notes that those most influenced and inspired by the Situationist International have 'performed so poorly the task of communicating the spirit of their vision in North America' (ibid )

In Knabb's article, on 'The Realization and Suppression of Religion', Knabb himself makes a critique of the 1970s pro-Situ scene, mainly in the San Francisco bay area:

'The situationist scene, providing a favorable field of play for vanity and in-group games, has attracted many people with very little to do with the revolutionary project; people who in other circumstances would have been fops, dandies, social intriguers, cultural dilettantes, hangers-on...

'Conversely, the situationist scene has tended to repel other in many ways serious individuals who felt this pretentious egoism to be an anachronism far removed from any revolution they would have been interested in. Seeing this pretentiousness apparently linked with the situationists' trenchant radicality, many people facilely rejected both at once...The movement that counted on the radical appeal of antirole, antisacrificial activity ended up repelling people who had no desire to sacrifice themselves to the reactionary situationist role.' (15 p.14)

This discussion, in addition to providing an ethnographic context outlining attitudes at work in the pro-Situ scene, and perceptions of others about this milieu, provides also an illustration of the evaluations of past projects and radical milieux. Such evaluations are an important part of many post-Situationist and related projects and constitute an attempt, also at work in other periodicals discussed in this thesis, to provoke self-reflection and critical evaluation of existing radical scenes, with the hope of influencing and redirecting radical interventions.

In the case of Knabb's article, it was originally written in 1977, and republished in *Anarchy* in 1988, which indicates that the editors deemed it to have continuing relevance both in influencing current radical scenes and in contextualising and explaining some of the more negative perceptions of Situationist and pro Situationist projects. Chernyi ends his introduction to Knabb's article by writing

'Now as much as ever, an understanding of the situationist project remains an essential part of understanding the possibilities and prospects for any genuinely revolutionary movement today.' (15 p 12)

This interest by *Anarchy* editors in disseminating Situationist ideas to a wider readership is underlined by one issue devoted to the theme of 'The Situationists and Beyond' (29 Summer 91),

in order to explore 'the importance and influence of the Situationist International for contemporary anarchists' and its 'inspiring example with its attempts to explicitly tie radical theory and practice to everyday life' (29 Summer 91 p.2). The issue includes articles by a range of Situationists (an extract from Vienet) and post-Situationists (including John Zerzan, Bob Black and Tom Ward) and a critical evaluation of the Situationists by Chernyi.

Chernyi cites the many themes which the Situationists brought 'to new prominence', and which remain 'of central relevance to any liberatory perspective today which seeks to grapple with the totality' (29 p 14). The most important themes in the Situationist legacy are cited as the society of the spectacle, the critique of all specialists, the revolt against work, the importance of radical subjectivity, self-organisation and everyday life.

Chernyi upholds the Situationist focus on the totality and rejects the postmodernist critique of any totalizing impulse as essentially totalitarian. He argues:

'there remains a clear and key difference between genuinely radical attempts to provisionally grasp an unreified totality, and the clumsy manoeuvres of pseudo-radical ideologists (i.e. postmodernists) to fit life into a closed, claustrophobic system.' (29 p.14)

In his view, the concept of totality is crucial for radical theory

'since, without it, even the most incisive analyses have no firm, concrete context within which to play out their implications. Without it, the temptation always returns to found radical theory on the authority of the empty abstractions of metaphysics, science, religion or moralism, and turn it into another pseudo-radical ideology.' (ibid.)

Chernyi however argues that the leftist Marxist input into the Situationist concept of totality leads to an 'ideological closure' and that this acceptance of Marxism was 'always at odds with their more anarchistic tendencies'.

Chernyi sees the task of disentangling what is of value in the Situationist legacy as falling to anarchists. As he writes.

'The tension between these two sides of (the Situationists') theory and practice (anarchistic tendencies versus Marxism) permeates their legacy, leaving it for anarchists to disentangle the rotting threads of Marxist ideology from the rest of the living body of libertarian theory.

...In the end, it is left to us to continue the work of selective demolition contributed by the SI...It is up to us to move beyond the accomplishments of the SI. Our turn to play!' (pp 14-15)

This evaluation of the legacy of the Situationists and post-Situationists such as Jacques Camatte (see Chapter 5) is taken up in later issues of *Anarchy*, such as issue 48 Fall-Winter 1999-2000, in which several articles are devoted to the theme of 'Post-Left Anarchy'. One article by Alex Trotter argues for a distinct separation with the left. He sees the left as characterised by the 'reform revolution' distinction, and to this he contrasts the post-left project of anarchy as 'revolution of everyday life (and) the project of casting off the totality of modern domination' (48 1999-2000 p 41). Both concepts draw on Situationist ideas. Despite his partial consigning

of the Situationists and Camatte to the paradigm of revolution which seems exhausted in the West', he notes

'Perhaps revolution still has possibilities, I have a lingering attachment to it myself. Situationist and autonomist theory seem to represent the tail end of the best of the Marxist tradition' (ibid)

Trotter is writing at the point in time (1999) when the concerns of radicals and environmentalists about the accelerating destruction by capitalism of the earth's ability to sustain itself are beginning to become more evident to those in dominant mainstream culture. He writes that it

'looks as if the entire world will become Americanized, if it isn't already' (p 42)

He compares the United States to the Roman Republic in awaiting a denouement, one scenario of which might be the collapse and abandonment of Western civilization. Nonetheless, Trotter draws on what can be salvaged from the best of the left, including Situationist theory, and draws on writings by Camatte in arguing that third world societies, which are still predominantly agrarian, could resist capitalist penetration. He writes that rural communities and common lands which still exist in Africa, Asia and the Americas still have the potential to resist the march of capitalist globalisation which needs to break up and sweep away rural communities and common lands to further its purpose. (p 41)

### **A critique of postmodernism**

The discussion above has seen *Anarchy* editors and contributors upholding the Situationist notion of the totality against attacks by postmodernist theory in seeing such notions as totalizing and ultimately totalitarian. The periodical includes other more explicit critiques of postmodernism, particularly by 1990 when postmodern perspectives were permeating from academic circles into more radical milieux. This is an illustration of the extent to which radical anarchistic circles intersect with and engage critically with influences from wider spheres. *Anarchy* (26 Autumn 1990) includes an article on 'On resuming a language of anarchy: Heidegger's flower' by B Edna. This is given space, but it is printed alongside critical responses from Chernyi as editor and from John Zerzan.

Though there is little explicit discussion of postmodern or poststructuralist theory in Edna's article on Heidegger, both Chernyi and Zerzan respond by situating it firmly in the postmodern/poststructuralist turn in the opening lines of both articles. Chernyi notes how this theoretical turn has become popular amongst academics, and has filtered through to oppositional circles

'As the postmodern/poststructuralist theoretical turn has become more popular for academics grown bored with traditional theories, their enthusiasm for relatively empty word-play has begun filtering down into the ranks of socialists, feminists and environmentalists. So far the anarchist milieu has been largely spared this experience. However, even with the prevailing



climate of anti-intellectualism it's possible we'll soon see "poststructuralist anarchism" become a hot topic for aspiring theorists. The problem with this is that poststructuralism has little to offer anarchist theory, while anarchist theory stands to lose its critical edge when and if it is processed by the postmodernist sausage-grinder.' (ibid.)

Chernyi reiterates his dialectical phenomenological perspectives, arguing against surrender to dogmatic, reified or deified categories. In Heidegger's thought, these categories are 'Language' or 'Being'. In the case of deep ecologists or biocentrists such as Earth First!, who were gaining widespread popularity at this time, Chernyi sees the category being surrendered to as 'Nature'. Chernyi sees liberatory theory as requiring a 'critical dialectical approach with fetishizes neither rational discourse nor poetry, but values both:

'for liberatory theory the point is never to take sides in battles over allegiance to contrary intellectual categories. Each distinction we make provides us with an opportunity to explore the possibilities of *both* sides of the prior whole that has been cleaved in two.' (ibid.)

Zerzan's critical response to Edna's article on Heidegger is followed up several issues later by a long article entitled 'The Catastrophe of Postmodernism' (*Anarchy* 30, Fall 1991 pp 16-21). Zerzan excavates the meanings and origins of postmodernism and gives critical evaluations of Derrida, Lacan, Barthes, Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze and Guattari and Baudrillard. His discussion (six A3 pages of print) includes the observation that Derrida, despite his aim to subvert all systems' claims to any kind of transcendent truth, raises *difference* to transcendent status. He contrasts Freud who 'at least gave us an understanding of culture as stunting and neurosis generating', with postmodernism which

'tells us that culture is all we can ever have, and that its foundations, if they exist, are not available to our understanding' (30, p.19)

He sees in Foucault's notion of power and knowledge as inextricably linked, with no resistance to power that is not a variant of power itself, as explaining why Foucault's ideas were 'greatly boosted by the media, while the situationists, for example, were blacked out' (ibid.) Encapsulating the contrast between Foucault's notion of power as everywhere and the Situationist's liberatory theory, Zerzan writes 'Foucault finds no beach underneath the paving stones.' (p.20)

Zerzan concludes his critique of postmodernism with 'We are fast arriving at a sad and empty place, which the spirit of postmodernism embodies all too well ..

.. where are vitality, refusal, the possibility of creating a non-mutilated world? Barthes proclaimed a Nietzschean "hedonism of discourse" Lyotard consoled, "Let us be pagans". Such wild barbarians! Of course their real stuff is blank and dispirited, a thoroughly relativized academic sterility. Postmodernism leaves us hopeless in an unending mall, without a living critique; nowhere' (p 25)

## **Anarchy and primitivism**

John Zerzan is one of the most well-known proponents of the anti-civilization primitivist strand in anarchism, and his writing is regularly printed in *Anarchy*. Though *Fifth Estate* (see next chapter) is the main publication disseminating primitivist ideas, the periodical stopped accepting Zerzan's essays for publication due to disagreements between Zerzan and one editor of *Fifth Estate*, George Bradford. The anarcho-primitivist strand will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter. Here I want briefly to indicate its propagation in *Anarchy*, from Zerzan's articles to an issue devoted to 'Abandoning Civilization' (33, Summer 1992). Other early examples include the serialisation between 1986 and 1989 of a collection of speeches purportedly written by a South Pacific chief intended for his people and providing a critique of European civilization (from issue 10, Feb/March 1986 to 20/21 Aug-Oct 1989). The introduction by *Anarchy* editors cites this account, The Papalagi, as 'a sort of critical reverse anthropology in which white European civilization is thoroughly dissected and evaluated with the puzzled contempt that it so well deserves from a "primitive" perspective.' (15, p 11)

The observations made by the chief, Tuivaii of Tiavea, overlap with Situationist-style critiques, as in the following example describing the chief's consternation at the Western experience of the cinema and on newspaper reading:

'Getting absorbed in the pseudo-life has become a passion...grown so strong that they completely forget the real thing. That passion is a disease ..' (15, p 11)

'...The papers try to mould every head to one form...They want everybody to share their head and their thoughts...

'...The places of pseudo-life and the many papers have made the Papalagi (European) into what he is now, a weak and lost human being, who loves what is unreal..' (15 p.13)

The authenticity of the speeches appears to be supported by their translation by an anthropologist in a German edition in the 1920s, followed by Dutch and English translations in 1929 and 1971 respectively. Their publication in *Anarchy* as a reverse critical anthropology, with a striking similarity to radical critiques such as those made by the Situationists on the 'society of the spectacle', serves as a critique of modern Western life and a pointer to a fuller existence enjoyed by Pacific islanders

An interview by *Anarchy* editors with renowned libertarian socialist Noam Chomsky provides an illustration of an encounter between the mainstream anarchist positions of Chomsky, who advocates a libertarian version of modern Western industrial world, and the more radical perspectives, which have taken on board some primitivist critiques of civilization, of the *Anarchy* editors

The interview with Chomsky by *Anarchy* staff (Chernyi, Toni Otter, Avid Darkly and Noam) on anarchism, civilization and technology was carried out during a visit by Chomsky to Columbia

in April 1991 (*Anarchy* 29 Summer 1991 p 27). Chomsky appeared to cut short the interview in the middle, suddenly announcing that he had to leave in 5 minutes, which suggests that Chomsky found the anti technology perspectives raised by the *Anarchy* editors to his distaste

During the interview, Chomsky states that he has little sympathy for the anti-civilization perspectives put forward to *Fifth Estate* and that he felt more attuned with the parts of the anarchist movement which

'took for granted the existence of industrial society and wanted it to make it free and libertarian' (ibid. p.27)

An exchange in which Chernyi and Otter attempt to discuss a definition of civilization takes place with many interjections from Chomsky which present examples of warfare and brutality described in the Bible as pre-civilization rather than an effect of it. *Anarchy* staff put forward the critique of technology made by Jacques Ellul (1964) where, as they put it 'technology itself is seen as having a life of its own much like capital, which is a destructive...' Here Chomsky interjects with 'Do you believe that? I don't believe that. I think technology itself is essentially neutral.' Chomsky sees 'automobiles, robotics or information processing' as 'a liberatory technology' (ibid.). Otter also cites Illich's *Tools for Conviviality* as another influential text which sees technology becoming a force of domination

The interview illustrates the tension between Chomsky's commitment to finding a libertarian version of modern civilization and advanced technology, and the views of those involved in *Anarchy* and *Fifth Estate* who see the destructive force of modern industrial technology and civilization, which is seen as a force of domination. In the introduction to the issue on 'Abandoning Civilization', McQuinn (alias Chernyi) writes:

'At this point in the development of the earth by the Leviathan civilization, we are all descendants of the conquered. Let us continue the resistance to our collective enslavement.' (33 Summer 1992 p.4)

## Conclusions

*Anarchy* contains examples of rhetoric acting as an evocative call to opposition. This is combined with measured argument reworking academic concepts to develop liberatory visions. The periodical has been sustained over two decades and forms a project, involving dialogue with contributors and readers, which develops ideas for radical transformation. *Anarchy's* most predominant editor gains advantage in communicating his version of dialectical phenomenology in the form of response and postscript. Opposing all dualisms, which he conceives as being two halves of a whole cleaved in two, his perspective emphasises the process by which the individuals can strip away the ideologies which are absorbed through the wider system and through having our thinking done for us by ideologues and authority figures. The individual subject has the power to become conscious of the ideologies of which s/he has consented

become the tools, for example, of God, or Progress, or the Market, or Authority, and can reject the domination of capitalism – commodity exchange – and hierarchy, which has become projected onto the realm of myth, metaphor or superstition

This 'critical theory', in which the subject becomes their own theorist and critic sees their own thought as ruthlessly as that of others, is propounded also in a debate which emerges on the role of the sacred and religion, against a backdrop of wide interest in ancient religions and holism in the 'New Age' movement from the 1980s. This debate, spanning many issues and running for two years, is an important one: history and the subject are discussed at a deep level by readers, some of them prominent in anarchist networks through their own writing, and editor of *Anarchy*, all exploring spirituality and notions of the sacred in the context of their perspectives on transformation, with Chernyi as editor, encourage a debate that moves 'beyond bankrupt posturing' between religion and atheism.

In its aim of appealing to as wide an audience as possible without compromising its perspectives, it forms a continuity with the (modernist) search for universals and appeal to a potentially universal audience.

Other spheres of interest, from new age to Earth First's biocentrism create new upsurges of debate, and the influence of postmodernism on academia, filtering through to radical milieux, instigates a renewed exploration of the Situationists' focus on the totality. Chernyi, as editor, concludes that it is left to anarchists to 'disentangle the rotting threads of Marxist ideology from the rest of the living body of [Situationist] libertarian theory...Our turn to play!' (*Anarchy* 29 p.15) Dialogues and the engagement with primitivist/anti-civilization ideas overlap with those of the other major USA periodical, *Fifth Estate*, which is the subject of the next chapter.

The projects discussed in depth so far in this thesis have a common link in their deep level rejection of conventional perspectives on aspects of thought, politics and culture. From Turner's rejection of politics as playing into the hands of a spectacular game and espousal of a form of 'nihilism'; to *Here and Now*'s anti-anti- perspectives, rejecting all idealism, 'just continual despairing starting from zero'; to Vague's playful mining of transgressive spheres and inversion of tabloid sensationalism; to Home's relentless irony and parodies of, and feuds with, others in oppositional milieux, to *Anarchy*'s critical theory, in which the subject becomes her/his own theorist and becomes conscious of reified thought and experience. This continues the Situationist project of negation, albeit with different nuances and angles

The next project discussed, the anti-civilization perspectives of *Fifth Estate*, another prominent US periodical, develops angles which present a deeper critique, in opposing not only capitalism but the entire edifice of civilization and its technologies, and at the same time a more affirmative stance in affirming aspects of small-scale 'primitive' ways of life. *Fifth Estate*'s angles, nonetheless, are informed by Situationist ideas, and, in one sense, explore a critique which is one logical trajectory developing out of the Situationist critique of the totality, of the spectacle and commodity culture

## Chapter 11

### Primitivism, a critique of civilization and *Fifth Estate*

The Situationist project contains elements of a critique of modern society and industrial technology, for example when they write:

‘Through its industrial production this society has emptied the gestures of work of all meaning....This society tends to atomize people into isolated consumers, to prohibit communication. Everyday life is thus private life, the realm of separation and spectacle.

‘....[The] introduction of technology into everyday life – ultimately taking place within the framework of modern bureaucratized capitalism – certainly tends rather to reduce people’s independence and creativity ’ (Debord 1961 in Knabb ed 1981 p.71)

The Situationist notion of transformation is, nonetheless, based on a reworking of a large-scale industrial technological framework involving some urbanisation (eg ‘The central production of an entirely reconverted industrial work will be the organization of new configurations of everyday life..’ (Debord 1961 in Knabb ed 1981 p.75).

The Situationist critique of the *totality* of relations in the modern world also implies, in one logical extension, a critique of the totality of effects of capitalism and the modern industrial system. A critique of hierarchy needs also to take on board that state society and civilization is characterized by an intensification of hierarchical relations, and that it is only in small-scale primitive or traditional societies that hierarchical relations are very much less pronounced

This is the trajectory taken by a strand of anarchism, gaining influence in contemporary anarchist spheres<sup>1</sup> of the late 1990s and early 00s, that develops a critique of civilization and of industrial technology. It is often referred to as ‘primitivism’, though many of its proponents reject the tendency towards a fetishization of the primitive that is implied by the term.

*Fifth Estate*, a prominent American periodical, has, with writers such as John Zerzan and Fredy Perlman, played a key role in developing this trajectory, and forms the main focus of this chapter.

*Fifth Estate* (FE), which originated in 1965. From the mid-1970s onwards, FE has drawn on anthropological knowledge and critiques of technology, such as those of Lewis Mumford and Jacques Ellul, to develop an anti-civilization, anti-technology perspective that works ‘to discover the primitive roots of anarchy’ (*Fifth Estate* August 1975), and to indict ‘the entire edifice of civilization as being responsible for the long history of human misery’ (FE June 1979).

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<sup>1</sup> Debates in discussion groups (eg the Anarchist Research Group) and on the internet, in email lists and web sites (eg [www.infoshop.org](http://www.infoshop.org)) and in periodicals such as *Anarchy* (eg 51 Spring Summer 2000 and 52 Fall-Winter 2001-2) attest to the growing challenge of anti-civilization ideas in anarchism.



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Published Nov. 3, 1978  
Vol. 13 No. 7 (295)

35 cents outside  
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25¢

# Fifth estate

Will You  
Join The  
Dance?



NEVER BEFORE HAS THERE BEEN SO MUCH TALK ABOUT CIVILIZATION AND CULTURE AS TODAY—TODAY, WHEN IT IS LIFE ITSELF WHICH IS DISAPPEARING. AND THERE IS A STRANGE PARALLEL BETWEEN THE GENERAL COLLAPSE OF LIFE. . . AND THIS OBSESSION WITH A CULTURE WHICH HAS NEVER COINCIDED WITH LIFE, AND WHICH IS DESIGNED TO DOMINEER OVER LIFE.

—ARTAUD



Before discussing *Fifth Estate*'s anarcho primitivist perspectives, and influential currents in their formation, from Mumford and Ellul<sup>2</sup> on technology, to anthropological knowledge (Stanley Diamond, Pierre Clastres, Michael Taussig<sup>3</sup>), to the Situationists and Jacques Camatte, I want to contextualise the project with a brief account of its development from its roots in the 1960s, and a discussion of the contributions of two prominent writers in the primitivist strand, Fredy Perlman and John Zerzan.

### ***Fifth Estate* from the underground left to anti-technology**

*Fifth Estate* began in Detroit<sup>4</sup> in 1965 - an underground newspaper, characteristic of the hundreds produced throughout the USA in the 1960s, and founded by Harvey Ovshinsky, at the age of 17, after he had spent a summer working on the *Los Angeles Free Press*. *Fifth Estate* combined reviews of rock music with information about 'hip'/hippie events and radical action; it was handed out bi-weekly to friends and concert-goers ('History of the Fifth Estate' by Peter Werbe *FE* Spring 1996 Vol 31 no 1, 347 30th Anniversary Issue, p.1).

From 1970, Werbe, who has been involved in *Fifth Estate* since the 1960s, found that there was 'less "fun" and more "struggle" in our pages', a factor he attributes partly to heavy state repression in response to radical actions, and he left the editorial group in 1974. He rejoined in 1975, when the remnants of *FE* staff called for others to become involved to keep its publication going. Those who became involved, or re-involved, with the project at this time, had had previous involvement with radical interventions, from pranks to study groups and publishing. They had rejected Marx, Lenin, political parties, unions and other trappings of the traditional left, and were influenced by the writings of Fredy Perlman, Jacques Camatte, Jean Baudrillard, Wilhelm Reich, council and left communists, and the Situationists (ibid p.9). The three remaining staff of *FE* were not enthusiastic about the new influx of participants and left shortly after.

The new staff took the decision to stop paying salaries to staff and to stop accepting advertisements. Despite this commitment to an anarchistic anti-capitalist do-it-yourself ethos and the rejection of leftism, the new *FE* staff did not identify themselves as anarchist, and had no idea that any anarchists had survived the 1930s. This is in spite of the fact that *FE* has been listed (for example in the University of Michigan's Labadie Collection of libertarian and radical materials) as the oldest continually publishing anarchist paper in American history. Shortly after

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eg Lewis Mumford's *Technics and Civilization* 1934 46 Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society* 1964)

<sup>3</sup> Stanley Diamond's *In Search of the Primitive* (1974 1987) is an influential text, as is Pierre Clastres' *Society Against the State* 1987 (and both texts were available in the 1980s from the book distribution service which *Fifth Estate* operated at this time) the key text by Michael Taussig is *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism* 1980

*Fifth Estate* continued to be produced in Detroit with the involvement of Watson and Werbe, until 2002, when Werbe, at the age of 62, announced his intention to hand the journal over to Andy Smith in Tennessee

the new group took over however, they were contacted by a group of participants of the 1920s and 1930s anarchist movements

'with whom we established cordial and rewarding relationships. These stalwarts of another era have almost all passed from the scene, but their memory as committed, militant, unswerving proponents of "The Ideal" remains with us as a model of resistance and vision.' (ibid)

They also met Fredy Perlman and his wife Lorraine at their home for discussion. This illustrates the links between generations of radicals, and the importance of face-to-face contact for discussion, inspiration and mutual support.

By 1980 they rejected all 'isms' and extended the anti-authoritarian critique 'beyond the obvious oppression of capitalism and the state to uncover deeper roots of the repression of the human spirit and the biosphere. This led us to the positions often characterized as anti-technology and anti-civilization which this paper [FE] is best known for advocating.' (ibid)

By the mid-1980s, *FE* was drawing on anthropological writing; key influences were Stanley Diamond's *In Search of the Primitive*, Marshall Sahlins' *Stone Age Economics* and Pierre Clastres' *Society Against the State*. These texts were sold through their book store mail order distribution service. Other influences were Ellul and Mumford's critiques of technology, and radical ecological approaches to land use and food production such as those pioneered by Bill Mollison and the Permaculture (perennial horticulture) movement. As they wrote, 'we must find our way back to the village, or as the North American natives said, "back to the blanket", and we must do this not by trying to save an industrial civilization that is doomed, but in that renewal of life which must take place in its ruin.' (*FE* Winter 1985 Vol 19 No.4)

By the mid-1980s, *FE* was being published three or four times a year and had an average circulation of 4,500 (*FE* Winter 1988-89).

A summary of *FE*'s critical perspectives on the technological structure of civilization, and re-appraisal of the indigenous world and the character of primitive or original communism, is printed by *FE* in 1987. The summary forms a response to a questionnaire sent from the Italian anarchist magazine, *Rivista Anarchica*, on North American libertarian groups and publications which also illustrates the international connexions made between anarchist projects. In the summary, *FE* state that they recognise, along with American critical anthropologist Stanley Diamond that

'the longing for a primitive mode of existence is no mere fantasy or sentimental whim. it is consonant with fundamental human needs, the fulfilment of which although in a different form) is a precondition for our survival' (Diamond 1987 p.207 quoted in *FE* Winter/Spring 1986 Vol 20 no 3 issue 322)

*FE* states that they are not anarchists as such but are

'pro-anarchy, which is for us a living integral experience, incommensurate with power and refusing all ideology'. (ibid)



This substituting of the term anarchy in place of the more traditional anarchism is a practice common to both *Anarchy* and *Fifth Estate* and others, such as John Moore, Starhawk, and Hakim Bey. The use of the term anarchy indicates the desire to jettison the traditional identity and trappings of ideology expressed in the term 'anarchism', but to retain the meaning of the word as an expression of a freer society without government or power complexes.

*Fifth Estate* continues to be published 37 years on from its origins. The journal was edited for most of the first 37 years of its existence by two of the original members of staff, Peter Werbe and David Watson, who redirected the periodical when becoming involved in 1975. In 2002, Werbe, now aged 62, handed the task of editing and producing the journal over to Andy Smith in Tennessee.

### **Prominent writers in the development of primitivism**

I wrote to *Fifth Estate* in 1992 to ask if the editorial members would be willing to correspond with me about their project, and did not receive a reply. I have garnered the following from notes in *FE* and in a collection of *FE* essays (Watson 1990s pp. xi and 219-21).

The most prominent editorial members are David Watson and Peter Werbe. Watson, the most prolific writer for *FE*, also writes under the names of George Bradford, Dogbane Champion and T. Fulane. Watson cites the names of a dozen others who have collaborated on *FE* over the years, including Lorraine Perlman (partner of Fredy) and Marilyn Werbe (presumably Peter Werbe's partner).

Readers sometimes enquire about *FE* members' own use of technology, in view of their anti-technological ideas. Watson admits to using a car, washing machine and other machines at his home in Detroit, and cites urban life as enforcing this; nonetheless he does not own a television and several other commonly found gadgets<sup>5</sup>. Watson has experienced village life in Portugal, and he and his companion found living without a refrigerator, drawing water from a well and using a simple stove, to be a satisfying experience. Watson writes of handwashing clothes, 'I rather think that there is something to be said for it', though he would have preferred to have experienced this in company with others at the weekly communal wash of Portuguese village women, an activity denied to him on presumably on grounds of his gender (ibid. p. 220).

Another contributor to *FE* is 'Sunfrog', or Andy Sunfrog Smith, who, in 2000, was a Masters's student in English at Middle Tennessee State University, and a member of the Pumpkin Hollow Community in rural Tennessee, where he participates in the lifestyle of anarchistic communism as well as writing about utopian and communal projects (*FE* Winter 2000-1 p. 13). Smith took over the editorial and production of *FE* in 2002.

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Jason McQuinn of *Anarchy* has a motorbike and a rejection of car ownership appears to be a common choice by anarchists with whom I have raised this subject.

## **Zerzan and Perlman**

I want here to give a biographical account of two other writers, John Zerzan and Fredy Perlman, whose work has been highly influential in anti-civilization perspectives.

### **John Zerzan**

John Zerzan is a prominent contributor on primitivism. *FE* members stopped accepting his articles for publication in *FE* in the late 1980s, after a disagreement between Zerzan and George Bradford, one of the editors of *FE*. Bradford took issue with Zerzan's critical attack on language, culture and the symbolic; Zerzan accused *FE* of an over-emphasis on the symbolic. Zerzan's articles continue to be published in *Anarchy*, and his essays are collected into two books, which are influential in anarchist and related currents, entitled *Elements of Refusal* (1988) and *Future Primitive* (1994).

Zerzan grew up in Salem, Oregon, studied political science at Stanford University, and history at San Francisco State University, and was a postgraduate student at the University of Southern California (Campbell, D 2001 p.2). During the 1960s, he was involved in the anti-Vietnam opposition, labour issues, and leftwing politics, and acted as an organiser with a union of social services employees (ibid.).

During the 1970s he lived in San Francisco and wrote, with his partner Paula Zerzan, oppositional texts. During the early 1980s he moved north to Eugene, Oregon, where he has lived since. During the 1980s he was involved, with Dan Todd (part of the American pro-Situationist milieu), with Anti-Authoritarians Anonymous (Chernyi, introduction to Zerzan 1994). He lives in Eugene, Oregon, with his wife, the anthropologist Alice Carnes (with whom he co-edited the book *Questioning Technology*). They live in a housing cooperative, of which Zerzan is the president. He uses a bicycle as transport, does not own a car or a computer and has no credit cards. He makes his living doing odd jobs and babysitting and does volunteer work with disabled people in the weights room of the local YMCA and acts as discjockey playing music from classical to hip hop on a radio station attached to the local university (Campbell 2001).

John Zerzan attained some notoriety in the mainstream press in the USA in 1997 when it emerged that he had visited Ted Kaczynski in jail and sympathised with some of his critical ideas on modern civilization. Kaczynski has been convicted as the 'Unabomber' behind a string of bombings carried out intermittently over many years on universities and airports. An interview with Zerzan by a British investigative journalist, Duncan Campbell, cited Zerzan's disagreement with Kaczynski on the issue of violence against living things, and his view that he hopes that there will not be other Kaczynskis.

"I think that activity came out of isolation and desperation, and I hope that isn't going to be something that people feel they have to take up because they have not other way to express their opposition to the brave new world..."

"...Property destruction as a tactic is a totally different thing and we're in favour of that, but that is not violence." (Campbell 2001 p.2)

After the demonstrations in Seattle, November 1999, some of those looking for people 'behind' the demonstrations blamed Zerzan. Zerzan, stating his objections to being portrayed as someone leading an army of young anarchists into battle, says,

"People think I'm trying to push everybody into wild stuff but I'm more worried about people staying out of jail. This is not a game There has been some heavy stuff already and there will be more... We got some credit - or notoriety - over Seattle and a number of us were there, but it's not our priority to be dashing around. I think the question now is whether mass street protests have a big future. Will we go through the ritual of these pre-planned situations in the streets where people get arrested or should we put our energy elsewhere." (ibid).

Zerzan's critiques extend beyond that of civilization to questioning above all the division of labour and agriculture, and also language and the symbolic sphere. The disagreement between Zerzan and George Bradford of *FE* involved Bradford's taking issue with Zerzan's notion of language and symbolic activity as inherently alienating. In Bradford's view these elements have 'co-evolved with our very physiological make-up' (*FE* Late Summer 1991 Vol 26 no.2 337 pp. 21-22). Another *FE* writer, Bob Brubaker, has criticized the extreme nature of Zerzan's critique, and sees Zerzan's vision of an alternative future as therefore unreachable except in heaven. Both writers appeared frustrated with Zerzan's writing during the early 1980s, and his use of quotations, some of them apparently 'dubious', and his use of secondary sources, had been the subject of critique (eg. by Brubaker in *FE* Summer 1983 and Bradford in *FE* Fall 1983 p.7).

Jason McQuinn (alias Chernyi), editor of *Anarchy* who continues to publish Zerzan's articles in the periodical, states his differences with Zerzan's ideas. Despite what he sees as the 'brilliance of Zerzan's compact synopses', McQuinn takes a critical stance to Zerzan's ideas. McQuinn takes issue with Zerzan's attempts to blame time, language and number for the development of alienation as too 'Manichean', and saw this attempt to locate the origins of alienation in certain well-defined places as tending to lose sight of 'the totalistic nature of our alienation, and its permeation of every aspect, factor and moment of our lives to some degree' (McQuinn, writing in *FE* Winter/Spring 1986 VI 20 No.3 322 pp.2-3).

### **Fredy Perlman**

Fredy Perlman is an influential writer in the primitivist tradition and gained popularity in the anarchist movement during the 1980s and 1990s. He played a key role in introducing Situationist and related French texts to an English-speaking audience, publishing translations of

Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* in 1970, and texts by Jean Barrot and Jacques Camatte (see Chapter 5) under his imprint, Black and Red. Fredy and Lorraine Perlman's home in Detroit became a gathering place for radical circles including those involved in *FE* and John Zerzan (who cites Fredy Perlman as having introduced him to *FE*).

Perlman's biography, as recorded in *Having Little, Being Much* by his wife Lorraine, is an unusually dramatic one. He escaped his birthplace of Czechoslovakia as a very young child with his Jewish family in 1938, just before the Nazi takeover. He lived in various places from Bolivia to Kentucky, USA. He attended the University of California at Los Angeles 1953-55, and with four others began an independent paper. He then attended Columbia University 1956-9, beginning as a student of English Literature and switching to philosophy, political science and European literature. An influential teacher during this period was the sociologist C. Wright Mills (about whom he wrote the book *The Incoherence of the Intellectual*).

After some years living in New York, where he and his wife Lorraine participated in pacifist activities, they spent from 1963 to 1966 in Europe, where Perlman received a Masters degree at Belgrade University's Economics Faculty. Back in Michigan, USA, Perlman taught at Western Michigan University (where he caused outrage by initiating student-run and student-graded classes). During 1968 he had been lecturing in Turin, Italy, shortly before the events of May 68 in Paris, in which he participated after arriving on the last train before rail traffic was shut down. He co-wrote with Roger Gregoire an account of the events in *Worker-Student Action Committees, May '68*.

In 1969 he left his teaching post in Michigan and moved to Detroit, where he continued the Black and Red publishing venture he had begun in Michigan. He continued to write and publish until his death in 1985 at the age of 50, ten years after his first heart surgery.

The biographical material above is drawn from an appreciation of Perlman in *FE* on the occasion of his death. *FE* writes of his pursuit of radical theory and practice, and of a connection between the two which would overcome the split between thought and action, which informed his decisions. Two examples of this are his decision to leave the United States in the wake of the Cuban missile crisis, and to abandon his career in university teaching at the end of the 1960s, and to create with others, including his wife Lorraine, the Black and Red imprint and the Detroit Printing Co-op. (ibid)

This observation about the desire to live as far as possible in accordance with anarchistic ideas held is one which informs the interventions of many of those discussed in this thesis. Many in anarchistic circles engage in interventions centred around disseminating anarchistic ideas and some, like Zerzan above, seek work which is as congenial as possible and allows time and energy for pursuing anarchistic projects

*Fifth Estate* write of Perlman's struggle to investigate the

'process of alienation and fragmentation by which human beings surrender their autonomy and participate in their own suppression' (*FE* October 1985 Vol 20 no.2 321 p.14/*ibid*)

They describe his 'animating' influence and the way in which his ideas and convictions changed during his explorations, for example moving, in the 1970s,

'beyond marxist theory and anarchist historiography, beyond technology, beyond modernity, to a rediscovery of the primitive and of primitive human community, and to the understanding that capital is not the inevitable outcome of some "material" historical development, but a monstrous aberration.. still central to his concerns was the problem of freedom - why people choose to remain passive participants in their own alienation, why they continue to reproduce the conditions of their own misery. In 1969 he described the power of Capital as residing in the daily activities of living people, and the result of this power: "Men who were much but had little", he wrote in *The Reproduction of Daily Life*, "now have much but are little".' (*ibid*)

This presents, in *FE* writers' words, the importance of Perlman's ideas for them. The appreciation ends with a statement of the loss of Perlman as a friend, and 'his physical presence among us, his preposterous jokes and pointed stories, the sound of his voice, his handshake...' (*ibid* p.15)

### *Perlman's writing*

Fredy Perlman's most renowned book is *Against History! Against Leviathan!* (1983), in which he adopts an emotionally charged ranting style, peppered with esoteric references to ancient history and mythology, and uses vivid images and metaphors. To give the flavour of his hectic invective:

'The biosphere, Mother Earth herself is free when she moistens herself, when she sprawls in the sun and lets her skin erupt with varicolored hair teeming with crawlers and fliers...

'An armored one asks: If the Age of Gold was so valuable, so beautiful, so pure, why did people leave it? If the Civilized remember it, why don't they rush back to it? If it was so comfortable why don't farmers throw away their plows and return to digging sticks? (This same questioner also asks: If you're so smart, why aren't you rich?)' (1983 p. 7 and 13)

Perlman cites other writers whose work has influenced him and who have revealed the savagery, barbarism and destructiveness of civilization: from Frederick Turner, author of *Beyond Geography The Western Spirit Against the Wilderness*, Arnold Toynbee, Jacques Camatte, Guy Debord, John Zerzan; to earlier writers such as Melville, Thoreau, Rousseau, Lao-Tze. He outlines where some of these writers locate the force which has wrecked the Biosphere: for Frederick Turner, it was the Western spirit; for Toynbee, it is mankind; for Marxists, it is the capitalist mode of production; for Camatte the 'monster' is Capital, but Camatte does not describe the origin of the 'monster'.

Perlman looks to the origins of civilization or Leviathan, and surmises a scenario that led to the development of Ur as possibly the first state. In this scenario, those who fled this hierarchical system built fortresses to keep the conquerors out, and in doing so created the same hierarchical state system which they were attempting to escape. He contrasts the bonds of civilization with the free human beings described in Richard Leakey's accounts of early humans. Perlman imagines early humans as living a life free of commands from superiors, sharing food, experiences, visions, songs (1983 p 8) (this is presumably based on Leakey's perspectives on cooperation as a determining factor in human evolution).

### **Bob Brubaker**

Bob Brubaker was a contributor to *Fifth Estate*, before his death following an asthmatic attack in 1992 while he was living in Japan (*Anarchy* Summer 1992 no. 33 Obituaries on Bob Brubaker 1952-1992 p.5).

Brubaker, born in 1952, grew up near Pittsburgh. In one obituary, Shagbark Hickory writes of meeting Brubaker in 1972 at the University of Illinois, at the 'anarchist literature' table. Hickory cites Brubaker's interest in the Situationists whose ideas, and those developed by post-Situationists, were an influence on his own. Brubaker had moved first to Wisconsin, then San Francisco, and then to Detroit in order to work with *Fifth Estate* (ibid).

In the mid-1980s he moved to Japan to work as an English teacher. He had planned to work with Lev Chernyi on *Anarchy* on his return to the USA, but continued to work in Japan until his death in 1992. Alice Carnes (co-writer with and wife of John Zerzan) also contributed an obituary in which she raised the question of why Brubaker chose to live for many years in Japan. Carnes cites Brubaker's claim to have stayed because his work paid well, but Carnes writes that there must have been 'more to it' and makes an interpretation based on his letters to her about modern life in Japan lived 'in all its horror and grossness'. Carnes writes that she 'hazard[s] a guess that Bob chose to live unfettered and unprotected by the dictates of mediated mass culture, by living in a land at once depressingly familiar, and unrelentingly foreign.' (ibid p 8)

### **Civilization and its tolls**

Before I move to a discussion of *Fifth Estate's* anti-civilization perspectives, including those of Brubaker, I want to note the incidence of a number of obituaries of those, involved in radical and anti-civilization milieux, who died before old age and on whom modern civilization took a severe toll. Perlman died at the age of 50, of heart problems, and Brubaker at 41 of asthma, both diseases particularly associated with Western industrial society (and in Perlman's case, smoking, promoted by the tobacco industry, may have contributed). In Britain, Larry Law, who produced

the populist pocketbooks of Situationist ideas in the 'Spectacular Times' series, died at the age of 42 of cancer of the bowel, another disease of modern Western diet and lifestyle

Obituaries of two other radicals in the USA are, firstly, one about Carla Glidden (1964-1994), who was involved with *FE* and who died of a blood clot. Glidden is said to have struggled with a 'mental disability that challenged her with periodic trips to the dark side of human consciousness' (*FE* Winter 1990 Vol 93 no 3 333 p 4), which suggests severe depression, and Chris Filmer (1954-1989) who appeared to take his own life in some emotional pain and anguish (Obituary in *Anarchy* Summer 1990 p 4). In Britain, long time anarchist and humanist Nicholas Walter died in 2000 of leukaemia while in his 60s. In France, Guy Debord shot himself at the age of 62.

It is difficult to say whether there is any higher incidence of untimely death amongst radicals, particularly in the USA, as a result of the tolls, psychic, emotional and physical, wrought on individuals by modern Western civilization. All that can be said is that it appears that a sensitivity to and awareness of the destructive forces of modern capitalist civilization are no guarantor of avoiding its tolls.

To counter this sad note, I should add that there are of course many individuals in radical anarchist and post-Situationist milieux who live well into old age.

### **Fifth Estate: anti-technology and anti-civilization ideas**

From the late 1970s, *FE* began to develop their radical critique of civilization itself as the locus of institutionalised hierarchy, exploitation, intensive agriculture, and environmental destruction via advanced technology. They look to primitive societies as providing examples of social relations and sustainable land use in order to envision alternative futures. In *FE*'s view, this 'parts company with all existing social theory' (*FE* June 1979).

A contrasting view, more typical of mainstream anarchism, which seeks a libertarian version of industrial society, is that expressed by Noam Chomsky (see previous chapter) in an interview with *Anarchy*.

The term 'primitivist' and 'primitivism' as used by *FE*, John Zerzan and others in the green/environmental anarchist movement needs to be understood as to its meaning in this context, which differs somewhat from its current use by anthropologists. In anthropological circles, primitivist refers to a re-creation or re-invention of primitive forms (tribal aesthetics, the collection of primitive art, holidays in exotic places where the 'primitive' can be experienced) which do not consciously imply a critique of civilization or modern society, or necessarily a desire for social change. Another sense in which the term is used is by anthropologists such as Jonathan Friedman, who ascribes to the civilizing process a universality, with primitivism located as an unconscious reaction proceeding out of cycles of growth and decline of civilised centres (Friedman 1983). Friedman's notion of the civilizing process as universal ignores the

specificity of civilization as a socio-political economic formation connected with institutionalized hierarchy and the state.

By contrast, in *Fifth Estate*'s notion of primitivism, the term is used to describe small scale non-centralised communities as a mode of living with a degree of autonomy not possible in large-scale hierarchical 'civilizations' and state societies.<sup>6</sup>

The development of 'primitivist' ideas, by *FE* and related currents, is in keeping with its use by libertarian humanist Marxist anthropologist Stanley Diamond, whose text *In Search of the Primitive* (1974/1987) was highly influential for *Fifth Estate*. Diamond outlines a critique of civilization which argues for learning from the 'primitive' to create conditions and social structures which fulfil our 'species being' as Diamond, after Marx, puts it. Diamond writes:

'The search for the primitive is the attempt to define a primary human potential. Without such a model...it becomes increasingly difficult to evaluate or understand our contemporary pathology and possibilities.' (1987 p.119)

'The problem, and it remains the central problem of anthropology, is to help conceptualize contemporary forms that will reunite man with his past, reconcile the primitive with the civilized...enabling us to experience the qualities that primitive peoples routinely display. This, in turn, demands innovation of the highest order, even if nourished on despair' (ibid p 175)

Diamond's perspectives are seen as romantic primitivism by most anthropologists, who are reluctant to use primitive social relations as a kind of 'model' or 'exemplar' to criticise civilization. Diamond, Turnbull (1961) and Brody (2001) have gone against the academic grain in adopting a relational or dialogic rhetoric and avoiding detached causal models that will explain stasis or change.

Following Diamond, *FE*'s perspectives take the deep past seriously. The relationship to the past in primitivist stances extends beyond the key influences on anarchism, and anarchistic moments in history, to a relationship with earlier and contemporary small-scale human lifeways. It appears to be no coincidence that an inspirational movement in the development of anti-capitalism has been that of the Zapatistas in the Chiapas, and their struggle to be allowed to continue their indigenous way of life.

What is of significance in the development of anti-civilization perspectives, amongst Perlman, Zerzan, *Fifth Estate* and others, is that this flourished during the 1970s and 1980s, and primarily in the USA, at a time (and place) when the impact of capitalist modernization was biting deep – with the building of highways and urban sprawl and the intensification of a lifestyle based on waste and fossil fuel consumption. Those in the USA, experiencing the forefront of this expansion and penetration, also experienced an impetus to explore deeper into the roots of this

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Some of those sympathetic to primitivist currents have nonetheless expressed their reservations about the term 'primitivism', for its tendency to denote a backward-looking perspective, and for the notion of an ideology connoted by the term as an 'ism'. See for example 'Interview with John Moore'



process which they found, just as did Diamond (1974), in the emergence of civilization and state society itself.

The development of such critiques is also one trajectory which follows logically from an interest in Situationist ideas and their critiques of consumption and the spectacle, which, as an aspect of the social relations of capitalism, throw up a critique of the technologies and social relations of civilization and state society itself.

The question amongst those who support these more radical critiques is to what extent the seeds of civilization are present also in small-scale primitive societies, and to what extent technology is neutral. These questions are addressed, for example, in the interview with Chomsky, and in the debate on anarchy and the sacred, in the previous chapter.

### *Stone age economics*

Another influence on *FE*'s perspectives was Marshall Sahlins' *Stone Age Economics*, a seminal text well known for the argument that hunter-gatherers spend less time on 'economic' tasks (food production etc) than any other kind of society, and that there is generally an abundance of food for subsistence needs. A liberally edited extract from Sahlins' book is included in *FE* under the heading 'How we used to live before the rise of the state, technology and government' (*FE* June 1979 Vol 14 no.3). Highlighted in large type display is one quote, from Sahlins, which reads:

'The world's most primitive people have few possessions, but they are not poor. Poverty is a social status. As such it is the invention of civilization.' (ibid. p.7)

*FE* writers present an introduction to the text, which develops their critique of technology and of the Marxist notion which takes modern technology as the starting point for the Marxist vision of the future. The seeds of domination are seen in the Neolithic Revolution, when agriculture developed in order to produce the surplus being expropriated by dominant groups.

Anticipating critics who might accuse them of 'wanting to go back to the caves', *FE* argues:

'We are not posing the Stone Age as a model for our Utopia nor are we suggesting a return to gathering and hunting as a means for our livelihood.' (ibid)<sup>7</sup>

They state their aim as, rather, to uncover pre-civilized ways of life in which people lived without cities and factories, with an intimate knowledge of each other and their natural surroundings (ibid)

### **'Against the megamachine'**

By 1981, *FE* writers had clarified their perspectives, following two months' intensive library research which they describe as a process of uncovering further horrors

'Everywhere we turned we found more horrors, more corruption, more decay and a greater urgency to somehow resist its conquest. Everything started to come under question, every commonplace of this civilization.' (July 1981 Vol 15 no.5 p.3)

The issue of July 1981 seems to contain the outpourings of months of research and discussion by *FE* writers, whose articles here have a sense of urgency and a desire to communicate their insights, evoked in the metaphorical style of writing, which combines the rhetorical style of the Situationists with that of Fredy Perlman (see above). The opening polemical tract, 'Introduction. Against the Megamachine' by T. Fulane, counterposes modern civilization to life and the human spirit itself: an enormous edifice of the technological labyrinth of the megamachine threatens life itself, in a metaphorical expression of their horror of the existing world. The rhetorical use of dramatic metaphor exhibits the influence of both the Situationists and Fredy Perlman; metaphors such as 'labyrinth', 'monstrosity' express the desire to communicate a sharpened awareness of the destructiveness of modern civilization and its megamachine:

'We are all trapped in the technological labyrinth, and at its center awaits our annihilation. We have already lost more than we can imagine to civilization's insatiable hunger for power and uniformity. We live in the shadow of an enormous edifice, a monstrosity which teeters and threatens to collapse upon us in a moment. We sing, make love, struggle and despair amid its decomposing limbs. But the smell of decomposition is general. We are in eclipse: the human spirit is moribund.

'Urban civilization is a vast junkyard... To resist it seems incoherent and hopeless. But the flaming trajectory of progress is what is truly mad, because its false optimism conceals a vicious cynicism and despair at the possibility of life. Realizing that all is lost, this consciousness surrenders to the momentum: after all, this is the Machine Age, and there is no room for human beings in a world of automata.'

### **The use of anthropology and Brubaker on community, primitive society, the state**

In the same issue, an article by Bob Brubaker (see above and previous chapter) on 'Community, Primitive Society and the State' draws on sources from anthropological writing to Mumford and Baudrillard in order to 'open up discussion about what constitutes community by examining societies worthy of the term' (ibid p 18)

With a call to Stanley Diamond's 'search for the primitive', Brubaker writes, 'In a time when the last vestiges of the primitive are being rooted out and destroyed, an elementary self-education about what is being lost is crucial. A part of ourselves, a possible mode of human being, is being irrevocably lost' (ibid)

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A return to gathering and hunting is however advocated by some green anarchists who argue that, after a transitional period in which the environment was allowed to regenerate, subsistence from wild foods would be possible (personal communication Theresa April 2001)

Drawing on anthropological texts by Clastres and Sahlins, Brubaker argues that societies with a subsistence way of life, particularly hunter-gatherers, spend little time acquiring food and have a contempt for work, and that their technology is not inferior but appropriate for meeting their needs.

Citing Baudrillard's *Mirror of Production*, Brubaker argues for the principle of embeddedness of culture and economy and notions of sharing, exchange and reciprocity which underpins primitive society, which mitigate against acquisitive accumulation. Lewis Mumford's *The Myth of the Machine* is drawn on to suggest that the primitive infuses every part of his experience with significance. He cites Clastres' notion of primitive chiefs not as despots but as 'prisoners' of the community by their obligation to reciprocity, to be generous and to help keep the peace. The example of Hawaiian chiefs who could be killed if they put too great a demand on their people is used to illustrate what Sahlins saw as the boundary of primitive society:

"If Hawaiian society discovered limits to its ability to augment production and polity, this threshold which it had reached but could not cross was the boundary of primitive society itself." (p.19)

Michael Taussig's ethnography of south west Columbian peasants, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism* is cited as further evidence of the principle of reciprocity: peasants saw the accumulation of money as a contract with the devil, as it distorts reciprocal relations (ibid). Clastres and Diamond's texts are used to describe how the qualities of primitive society are destroyed when people are forced to produce for others without exchange or reciprocity, instituting alienated labour.

Mumford's notion of technics is invoked to distinguish the 'democratic technics' characterising technology under the direct control of the craftsman and farmer, from the 'authoritarian technics' which predominated once the bulk of the agrarian population are forced from the land into factories in cities. Authoritarian technics allowed a new more complex suppression of precapitalist communities and their associated value systems, and the final ascendancy of the state-economic/technological complex.

Brubaker ends the article with an analysis of capitalism as disrupting communities and emptying them of their content. Technology then rushes in to fill the gap 'in an endless spiral in which each disruption of community causes the confusion and dislocation necessary for a new, more pervasive disruption.' (p 19)

### **Indigenism reclaimed**

The same issue appears to contain the outpourings of *FE* writers expressing the urgency of their critique with the use of metaphor. Another trenchant critique of the destruction of indigenous people and ways of life is by P.Solis. Solis, in 'Indigenism and its Enemies', presents a history of modern civilization, conceptualising the process of '*permanent conquest*', in the name of

'progress', by which the world, seen as an inanimate entity to be manipulated and exploited, is transformed into cargo, into value. This process reflects the emerging process of mechanization and alienation of human activity in the factory system, and involves the internal psychic repression necessary to rationalize society and assure labour discipline (ibid p.11). Solis uses an urgent and sometimes metaphorical style.

'Forgetting the wisdom of prehistory, humanity surrenders to the *dance macabre* of production, transforming a world once filled with myth and spirit into a quarry of surplus value and economic necessity.' (ibid)

Solis connects the destructive forces affecting indigenous people as affecting Western people, and he criticises anthropology for generally failing to turn its own methods of analysis on the civilization which spawned it, nor offering to the people studied insights into the nature of the 'juggernaut which threatens their existence'. (ibid)<sup>8</sup>

Solis moves to a critique of the reductive ways in which indigenism is used by the state, which appoints representatives from threatened indigenous people to act as 'administrators of industrial exploitation and agents of development'; in their hands, indigenism 'becomes a form of nationalism...which reflects the extinction of the innumerable little communities and their diverse ways of being.' (p.15)

Intensifying his poetic metaphorical rhetoric ('vortex', 'abyss', 'desert'), Solis argues for the reclamation by all people of the value of 'indigenism':

'The permanent conquest of capital seems like an hourglass, drawing the particles of sand irrevocably downward into time, into history. We are all drawn through that vortex, are all reduced to the same being, vagabond, solitary, proletarian fragments...How to oppose this inertia towards the abyss? We, who are the exiles of a remote and vague age, are already in the labyrinth. We continue wandering in our technological desert. There is no turning back on this "trail of tears" once the journey is commenced. If we cannot return to that which we were, what shall we become?' (p.16)

Solis quotes Octavio Paz on how extinctions of indigenous and traditional communities threaten the survival of the human species.

'The extinction of every marginal society and each ethnic and cultural difference signifies the extinction of one possibility for survival of the entire species. With each society that disappears - destroyed or devoured by industrial civilization - a human possibility disappears, not only a past and a present, but a future.'" (ibid)

Octavio Paz's call to save indigenous cultures as a means of survival for everyone is referred to elsewhere in *FE*. For example, George Bradford quotes Paz (from *The Other Mexico Critique of the Pyramid*):

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<sup>8</sup> This critique of anthropology by Solis draws on Stanley Diamond's *In Search of the Primitive*. It is ironic that Diamond has something of a 'fan club' amongst anthropologists who nonetheless focus on the affect of Western civilization on indigenous people, and neglect or sideline Diamond's essential argument

'The idea of a single civilization for everyone, implicit in the culture of progress and technique, impoverishes and mutilates us. Every view of the world that becomes extinct, every culture that disappears, diminishes a possibility of life.' (*FE* Winter 1982-3 p.9)

The American (Beat) poet Gary Snyder's writing in *The Old Ways* is also drawn in to make a similar argument. Snyder, whose notion of 'bioregional' communities has also been influential in anarchist and primitivist ideas, is quoted as writing:

"To combat cultural genocide one needs a critique of civilization itself." (ibid)

Solis ends by arguing for a 'new and critical anthropology', a new "planetary indigenism" which signifies

'a qualitative break with civilization, with modern technological social relations, and must signify a reconciliation with prehistory. It will take its poetry not only from the future, but also from the distant past which is here among us...a past and future in which modern and primitive will be reconciled in the search for human possibilities...' (ibid)

### **An ongoing critique of technology**

*Fifth Estate*, alongside a continuous development of a critique of civilization, also addresses current political issues and local (Detroit based) and international struggles, as well the impact of new technologies. Their critique of biotech and genetic modification appeared in 1985, a decade before the use of genetically-modified crops. Their critique locates biotech as an extension of capital's logic of accumulation and control, which imperils life itself (*FE* Spring 1985 Vol 20 no.1 no.320 p.14). Another critical discussion of electronic communication sees the internet and email as symptomatic of accelerated technology coupled with a depreciation of sensual reality and deterioration of communities (Sunfrog, 'A Treatise on Electronic Anarchy and the Net: Arguments for the Elimination of the Information Age' *FE* Winter 1995 Vol 29 no.2 345 p.3)

### **Situationist and post-Situationist influences**

*Fifth Estate* marked the tenth anniversary of May 68 with discussions of the events. The cover includes a quote from the Surrealist Artaud proclaiming:

'Never before has there been so much talk about civilization and culture as today - today, when it is life which is disappearing. And there is a strange parallel between the general collapse of life...and this obsession with a culture which has never coincided with life, and which is designed to domineer over life.' - Artaud (*FE* 295 Nov 3 1978, Vol 13 No 7 p 1)

Though written 50 years earlier, the quote from Artaud is selected as equally relevant to contemporary culture, and highlights the link between the avant garde tradition and the role of such ideas at the time of May 68.

The *FE* writers, in an introduction to two articles about May 68, make explicit their interest in May 68 as a means of gaining a perspective for their own activity, which highlights the relationship to the past as a means of learning and furthering ideas as well as drawing inspiration. One article is by Jacques Camatte (see Chapter 5), evaluating the events and conceptualising these as constituting a 'liberation-recovery' of 'movement, speech and imagination', elements which are ordinarily alienated and imprisoned by capitalism. Camatte concludes with a call for going outside of the 'community of capital' to recover 'movement, speech and imagination' by creating a frame of reference outside of capitalist mediations, as was created during the events of May 68 (ibid pp. 9-10).

A decade later, Camatte's influence continues to be evident in an article by E.B. Maple who draws on Camatte's theoretical perspectives to argue against collaboration with Marxists, and other leftists. Maple's critique of leftist groups uses Camatte's notion of groups as gangs and rackets (*FE* Spring 1987 Vol 21 no 2 325 p 4; see also Chapters 5 and 8).

Another issue includes a debate between Gerard of Interrogations, a post-Situationist group in France with a journal of the same name (with which Jean Barrot was involved), and Feral Faun. Gerard argues that there is nothing in the proletarian condition that could serve as a model for liberation, and that worker-managed industries would continue the same forces of oppression (a point apparently taken from Camatte, see Chapter 5). Gerard argues therefore for 'human beings' (rather than the 'proletariat') to bring forth a revolution (*FE* Winter 1990 p.28). Feral Faun objects to Gerard's use of the notion of 'human beings' and 'humanity', arguing that it is as unique individuals repudiating all categorizations, including that of 'human being' that we will abolish capital.

*FE* writers include alongside this debate a note on their own perspectives: they express agreement with Gerard that the proletarian condition is not the experience of fellowship or solidarity against capital, but rather the reduction of human beings 'to function as living commodities competing with other commodities' which 'conditions them to be disciplined and submissive'. (ibid p.28)

An example of the Situationists as the focus for a debate about contemporary radical practice, is in one initiated by a meeting at an American anarchist gathering. The debate centred on interpreting the Situationist project, and the value of Situationist ideas for current interventions, and was sparked off by the 1989 anarchist gathering in San Francisco (held 20-25 July).

Bob Brubaker is prompted to write an article which begins by expressing what he found most enjoyable about the San Francisco anarchist gathering - such as the informal gatherings with friends and being able to meet for the first time people with whom he had corresponded. These meetings afforded him 'the kind of intelligent, critical dialogue that seemed to be lacking in the

conference as a whole' (*FE* Winter 1990 no. 333 Vol 24 no.3 pp12-13) Brubaker's experience contributes an ethnographic understanding to the lived world of American anarchist currents, in which he finds most satisfying the informal encounters with others known to him, and those known to him through writing.

Brubaker comments on the difficulties he experienced in the workshops at the anarchist gathering, since these consisted of groups of 60 people or more with varying degrees of understanding. This highlights the sense of a circle of those well versed in particular fields of anarchistic theory, who can experience frustration with those less well versed

Brubaker's critical discussion centres on one workshop in which a speaker 'proposed the dubious hypothesis that radical therapy and New Age spirituality are the legitimate heirs of the situationist legacy. The situationists' emphasis on daily life and its subversion has supposedly been renewed and extended in the therapeutic and spiritualist milieux since the demise of 1960s radicalism' (ibid p.13)

Brubaker objects strongly to the 'naivete' of this revisionist interpretation of the Situationists which he sees as 'simplistic, one-sided or dead wrong', and which distorts and dilutes the thrust of the Situationists' critique of daily life. He criticises the distortions used by the speaker, such as the latter's claim that the situationists' main innovation was their attempt to construct "'theatrical situations'", a phrase, Brubaker points out, that the Situationists never used and would have abhorred.<sup>9</sup>

Brubaker argues that this cooptation of the situationist legacy into the 'symbolic, aesthetic, individualized expression of "personal growth" and creativity, which has reached its mature pitch in the constellation of groups and practices comprising New Age',

'negates everything the situationists tried to accomplish, beginning with their critique of the avant-garde. The situationists, unlike our speaker, were careful to distinguish the "construction of situations" from experimental theatre and similar avant-garde endeavours of the day.' (p.23)

Brubaker argues that the situationists saw no consolation or refuge in separated forms of expression such as art, theatre, and, by extension, contemporary New Age practices such as 'neo-Pagan rituals' (ibid).

Brubaker also discusses his critical perspectives of the anarchist movement in the USA which, he argues, seemed to have 'degenerated into a sort of clearinghouse for the various protest groups - the peace movement, anti-nuke groups, AIDS action groups and so on' (ibid) He refers to the title of his article, 'No Radical, Utopian Vision', in writing,

'Most anarchists, it would appear, have completely forsaken the desire to articulate and communicate a radical, utopian vision of the future, perhaps they have none to offer. What they *do* have amounts to little more than the empty promise of "endless struggle" (the title of one

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<sup>9</sup> Those versed in the Situationist texts object to or find ridiculous such misinterpretations of their writing. For example one obituary of Guy Debord in a mainstream British newspaper referred to his critique of the 'showbiz society'. Luther Blisset comments on the error and refers to the 'knowing titers with which his own circles responded to it' *Here and Now* Guy Debord Supplement 1994 p 6

anarchist periodical). One searches in vain through the vast majority of anarchist newspapers and zines for anything more substantial than cheerleading accounts of the latest riot or protest.' (ibid)

Brubaker illustrates what he sees as the diversion of anarchism into single issues, which tend to obfuscate a wider critique, citing 'Food Not Bombs' as having the effect of 'affirming the poor as a permanent caste within capitalism, able to survive only as wards of the state', indicating how far many anarchists have drifted from the original vision and principles of the anarchist movement (ibid).

Brubaker's critique of the anarchist movement shows a concern to evaluate and influence the contemporary movement (an element in all the post-Situationist interventions discussed in this thesis). His reclaiming or rescuing of the Situationists from the misinterpretations of the New Age speaker represents a desire for an accurate reading of the Situationist project, and an upholding of what Brubaker sees as their radical, utopian vision, which is seen as absent in current anarchist interventions. These critiques of mainstream anarchism and of single-issue campaigns are commensurate with the perspectives of the other post-Situationist interventions discussed in other chapters.

Brubaker's article is a characteristic example of the way in which post-Situationists draw on the Situationists' critique of the totality (and in this case the separation and diversionary value of aesthetic forms such as art and theatre) as a reminder of what has been the most significant influence on the anarchist movement in the 20th century. Such critiques suggest a desire to influence a redirection of interventions back towards an ethos and impulse which takes on board a radical vision and a critique of the totality through an accurate understanding of the Situationist project.

### **Debates with deep ecology and Earth First!**

Along with their anti-civilization and anti-technology perspectives, *Fifth Estate* is also well-known for its influential contribution to the debates on deep ecology and the radical environmental group Earth First.

George Bradford's article 'How Deep is Deep Ecology' ( *FE* Fall 1987) sparked so much interest and debate that this issue of *FE* quickly became out of print, and the article was printed in the form of a pamphlet of the same name (Bradford 1989). This was followed up by a second issue on deep ecology (Spring 1989 Vol 24 n.1 331), by which time the debate had opened up with arguments from 'Miss Ann Thropy' (a pun on misanthropy, and the pen name of a (male) writer arguing for deep ecology).

*FE* editors introduce the issue by citing their areas of agreement with deep ecology and its claim to



'go beyond the traditional moderate approaches of mainstream ecology and conservation organisations by advocating a "new paradigm" as the basis for arresting the destruction of the natural world and for defending wilderness. Deep ecology appears to challenge the reigning ethos of industrial development, technology, science and mass society.' (E.B. Maple and Lynn Clive 'About this issue' *ibid* p.2)

Referring to the debate so far between George Bradford of FE and proponents of deep ecology, Maple and Clive cite the main areas of disagreement as centring on the failure of deep ecology to understand the root of the current crisis within the political and economic context of industrial capitalism, which has led some deep ecology adherents to 'espouse an empty misanthropy in which all "humans" are blamed for the ecological problems we face, making no distinction for class, race or gender.' (*ibid*)

Miss Ann Thropy draws on postmodernist and poststructuralist ideas and quotes Foucault in arguing for "'decentring" mankind'. Thropy writes that deep ecology 'seeks "strategic knowledge" (to use Foucault's phrase)...an ethics of resistance, a "negative ethics", which flows out of the threat of environmental crisis.' (*ibid* p.4)

Miss Ann Thropy responds to a point made previously by Bradford about deep ecology's Malthusian theory of population: Bradford had claimed that there are enough resources for all five billion humans but that these necessities of life are being appropriated by capital. Miss Ann Thropy claimed that this could only be the case by ignoring the whole question of wilderness and the right of other species to exist (*ibid*).

Bradford's article, 'Return of the Son of Deep Ecology', occupying all the remaining pages of the issue (pages 5-32, including some illustrations), takes the form of an extensive response to the article/letter from Miss Ann Thropy. It is written in the academic (i.e. well researched and referenced) format characteristic of many other articles in *FE* (the bibliography and footnotes alone occupy eight pages). Bradford argues that deep ecologists tend to 'evade a genuinely critical dialogue', deflecting criticism in the way that religious dogma does (p.5) He sees them as wrapping themselves 'in american flag' with the idea of wilderness, and he objects to Thropy's accusation that Bradford is reducing the earth to resources for exploitation and also totalizing nature. Bradford cites his commitment to the defense of wilderness and biodiversity as fundamental human values, seeing no separation with nature and with the desire to defend 'the personhood of the planet and the *personhood in me*' (*ibid* p 6)

Bradford (in arguments commensurate with those made by Lev Cherny in *Anarchy* - see previous chapter) argues that his commitment here is underpinned by neither simplistically anthropocentric nor biocentric motives, arguing for a synthesis of such dualities. Bradford sees dualism as running 'rampant through deep ecology', starting with its 'ambiguous contrast of nature and humanity' (*ibid* p 8)

Bradford sees deep ecologists as proving to be 'far shallower than their critics' in answering the fundamental question of

'whether ecological analysis is sufficient to explain human culture's history and conflicts' (ibid p.7)

Deep ecology's pillar of the 'intrinsic value of nature' and debates on environmental ethics do nothing, Bradford argues, to prevent destruction of wilderness or human beings, and that from the discussion of 'rights' to be extended to animals and to land, one would think that the rights of human beings have been already firmly established - this 'in the age of mass exterminations of people in gas chambers, carpet bombings...and the threat of nuclear incineration in increasingly volatile gambles to defend the markets and resources of rival empires.' (p.9)

Bradford connects this to deep ecology's 'naivete about Power...inherited from the liberal environmental and conservation movements from which it emerged.' (p.10) He argues that he is not saying that there is nothing to be affirmed in an environmental ethic but that he wishes to point out

'the limitations of ecological thinking and the anthropocentrism/biocentrism contrast as a tool of radical critique...The scientific naturalism upon which it rests is extremely contradictory and problematic..' (p 10)

He sees the current discourse in which deep ecology participates as constraining meaning 'in a language that is already instrumentalized':

'Ironically, deep ecologists drink from the same polluted source as the marxists and liberal humanists they vilify: starting from the ideology of natural and historical necessity, they all assume the inevitability of scarcity and its consequent generation of needs...in nature, as in primal societies...there is no instrumental value at all, no need, just as there is no economy, no production' (p.13)

Bradford draws on environmental ethics debates ( Rolston and Callicott) to support his contention that 'Biocentrism cannot .replace a social critique or social solidarity' (p.16), and on Murray Bookchin's response to his critics in *Earth First!* - "'If we cannot 're-enchant' humanity, we will never 're-enchant' nature'" - while also stating his differences with Bookchin's 'marxism, rationalism and oblique defence of technology and progress' (p.17)

Bradford evaluates the idea of 'wilderness' which is a central concept in deep ecology, and notes that it is a major theme of preservation in the US, beginning with John Muir, who saw government control as essential in carving out a place for wilderness within civilization, without a critique of civilization itself (p 20) In Bradford's view, the preservationist movement is inadequate without a 'critique of imperial history and capital'; the defense of wilderness needs to be linked to social revolution and 'not to an elitist (and defeatist) lifeboat ethics' (p.21).

Bradford takes issue with the implications of Miss Ann Thropy's Foucauldian "'strategic knowledge'", and argues that deep ecology 'says *nothing* about what kind of society would be appropriate for living on this Earth. Such moral indifference spells a dead-end for environmentalism.' (p.23)

Bradford refers to the 'smug misanthropy of the catastrophist' (p.23) and sees in this a renunciation of 'freedom and dignity in a program of "salvation" (which) would reduce us all to the position of survivalists. .' (p.24).

This was an important contribution to a debate, carried out notably in *FE* and *Anarchy*, which gained the attention of people in Earth First! as well as in anarchist currents. The debate also indicates the importance of writing and print, as well as verbal discussion, in the formation of radical theory and practice. A large amount of discussion was aroused by radical ecological issues in the anarchist press from the late 1980s. As Lev Chernyi put it in 1991, 'In the last few years there have been few themes which have aroused as much discussion in the anarchist press as that of the relation of ecological radicalism to anarchist theory and practice.' (*Anarchy* 28 Spring 1991 p.8)

In *Anarchy*, one debate ran for several issues (16 Summer 1988 to 18, March/April 1989): one key proponent arguing for a biocentric position was 'Lone Wolf Circles', with Chernyi taking a critical position on dualisms such as biocentrism and anthropocentrism.

### **Fifth Estate in the intensification of global capitalism**

The intensifying effects of modern industrial capitalism in the 1990s, with the impact of the globalised free trade and of the biotech industry, and rapid environmental destruction, has forced the focus on radical critiques and technology towards a more urgent first-aid actions simply in an effort to arrest environmental destruction, according to Peter Werbe, one editor of *Fifth Estate*. Interviewed by *Alternative Press Review* (the 'sister' paper to *Anarchy*) in 1999, Werbe speaks of having undergone a 'sobering' experience in the last few years.

'The last few years have been sobering. A certain humility has crept into our thinking and way of life. It doesn't look like much of what we advocate is on the agenda. The machine rules everywhere. We are in a period of the total domination of capital where even the pseudo-opposition of socialism has left the scene - capital's 20th century rival... There is no longer any significant area, geography and thought that technology and capital hasn't extended itself into.

'...Calls, such as the one which appears on the masthead of the *Green Anarchist* (a paper produced in Britain) saying "For the Destruction of Civilization", sound shrill and incoherent at best, and, I'm sure, nihilistic to most readers not steeped in their ideology. I'm not saying we should step away from radical critiques of capital and technology, but increasingly we're being forced into rear guard actions whose demands step away from the totality and sound more like "Please don't kill everything so fast"

'We are at a critical point now trying to preserve those ideas which are at risk from being pushed from human consciousness. The Appendix to Orwell's wonderful dystopian novel, 1984, is instructive. The idea of Newspeak was to remove words from language and thus the ideas

they represent. I see our projects and journals as repositories of anti-authoritarian ideas that include an understanding that technology as manifested under industrial capitalism is a major factor in the domination of the human spirit.' (*Alternative Press Review* Vol 4 no 2 Spring/Summer 1999 pp.18-19)

Werbe also speaks of elements of hope and joy in resistance and the alternative culture built around it, even while recognizing the precarious position we are in and its 'biological, social and spiritual (and I don't mean religious ) decline'. He says,

'.. people retain something in spite of this, even those immersed in the spectacle and commodity society...That's why it's critically important for us to continue our projects on the margins of this society, even if it looks absolutely hopeless. For one thing, if we want to live out our lives as distant as possible from the dominant society, we better work hard to create an alternative culture and communities, hopefully ones that have the potential to eventually confront the dominant paradigms that currently rule us.' (ibid)

## Conclusions

*Fifth Estate* and the anti-civilization strand have followed one logical trajectory arising out of the Situationist critique of the totality, and of hierarchy, in indicting 'the entire edifice of civilization as being responsible for the long history of human misery.' (*FE* June 1979). While the other projects discussed in this thesis (with the exception of *Anarchy* which remains open to primitivist critiques though with a characteristic critical take) appear to take as given some aspects of modern society, such as some forms of industrial technology, large-scale society and urbanism, the anti-civilization strand questions civilization/state society and, in particular, modern industrial technology. *Fifth Estate* in one sense develops further the Situationist spirit of negation, which is strong in the other projects discussed (see the Conclusions of Chapter 10); and in another constructs a more affirmative vision of reclaiming a smaller-scale way of life in which the separations imposed by modern complex industrial society are transformed.

In developing this critique, the writers of *Fifth Estate* draw on a rhetorical style full of imagery and metaphor, in a powerful writing style that fuses elements of Perlman's writing with the Situationist tradition of lyrical rhetoric that is evoked in the writing of Turner and Mr Social Control (see Chapter 7). To quote again one example of their urgent critique.

'The permanent conquest of capital seems like an hourglass, drawing the particles of sand irrevocably downward into time, into history. We are all drawn through that vortex, are all reduced to the same being, vagabond solitary, proletarian fragments ' (Solis, *FE*, July 1981 p 16)

The words from Werbe, quoted above form a conclusion to this chapter on *Fifth Estate* and the previous chapters on post-Situationist periodicals. All can be said to act, as Werbe says, as 'repositories of anti-authoritarian ideas', and as points of contact in the alternative culture of resistance.

Though global capitalism's penetration continues apace, a movement against this has erupted, rippling from the indigenous movements in the Chiapas, Columbia, India, to grassroots social justice movements, to anarchistic and radical environmental currents, and finding new points of contact in expressions of protest at the Summits at which world leaders meet. The demonstrations at Seattle, Davos, Prague, Gothenburg, Genoa, have in recent years become the focus of periodicals such as *Anarchy* and *FE*, and issues of both periodicals have centred on documenting and evaluating these events (Seattle 1999, for example, is the focus *Anarchy* 49, Spring-Summer 2000 and *FE* Vol.35, 1, Spring 2000). The development of this movement against global capital is discussed in the next chapter.

## The legacy of the Situationists in anti-capitalist and activist currents

'Tens of thousands, festooned by a sea of banners and placards, converged. They dressed up as business tycoons on stilts, as monarch butterflies, vegetables, fish, and pigs. The highlight was a group of 200 environmentalists, fabulously made up in brilliant green-blue black sea turtle outfits, complete with an enormous, inflatable turtle floating above them.. .

'Then one group upstaged all the others...180 black-clad anarchists...smashed windows and trashed the shops of such notorious corporations as Nike, The Gap,...Starbucks, McDonald..., as well as some banks...while anti-corporate graffiti provided subtitles to the fin de siècle mayhem.' Jonathan Slyk 'Smashing Seattle: How Anarchists Stole the Show at the WTO' *Anarchy* 49 Spring Summer 2000 pp.53-4

"'Who are these guys anyway?'" *Time* journalist, writing about anarchists and Black Bloc participants in Seattle, November 30, 1999 (quoted by Slyk 2000 p.56)

The encounter between radical environmentalism and anarchism in the USA has surfaced in the discussion of Fifth Estate in the previous chapter. In this chapter I want to explore the continuing legacy of the Situationists in activist currents - from the radical environmentalists of the 1990s to anti-capitalist<sup>1</sup> currents which emerged from the late 1990s.

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<sup>1</sup> Anti-capitalist is something of a 'catch-all' phrase and it has been observed, for example by sociologist Ian Welsh (communication September 2002), that those gathering for protests at large summits are not necessarily anti-capitalist. The term 'anti-capitalist' has tended to be replaced in recent years by the term 'anti globalisation'. Graeber (2002) defines the common link between 'anti-globalisation' campaigners as a rejection of neo-liberalism, and sees the term 'anti globalisation' as an acceptable all-encompassing term, while also emphasising that anarchism is its guiding impulse in the embrace of direct action and non-hierarchical organisation

I continue to use the term 'anti-capitalist', however, to identify those grassroots currents whose interventions and perspectives explicitly reject capitalism, hierarchy and the state. Examples include anarchists groups such as Reclaim the Streets, and Peoples Global Action which acts as a coordinating network. The term 'anti-capitalist' is also used by participants themselves to distinguish their perspectives for example at London demonstrations 2001-2, anarchists organise 'anti-capitalist' convergence points (always singled out by police who dutifully follow them around) where like-minded individuals gather and march together.

The anarchist component of anti-capitalism as a rubric is emphasised by the fact that Globalise Resistance, a front for the UK Socialist Workers' Party who formed it in response to the rise of anti-capitalist protest, do not gather at or march with the anti-capitalist bloc, which is defined by several black or black and red flags, and usually accompanied by the samba band, Rhythms of Resistance. In an engaging touch, a couple of the anarchist flags are mounted on branches of trees with the bark left on and the natural curve and nobbles: this symbolises evocatively the do-it-yourself anti-professionalism and self-organisation of anarchism, and expresses an affectionate relationship to trees as elements of the living natural world largely obliterated by capitalism and urbanisation.

The chapter is structured so as to address firstly radical environmental currents in the UK, and secondly anti-capitalist currents

Under each section I address the following. Firstly, a brief account of the background to the interventions is intended to provide contextualisation to the material selected for analysis, and is not intended as a detailed analysis. Secondly I discuss an example of a text, produced by participants, which celebrates, documents and reflects on their actions, while drawing on the ideas of the Situationist. Thirdly, I analyse an example of an action in this milieu in relation to the legacy of the Situationists, and consider ways in which it reflects the Situationist project.

This chapter adds several important dimensions to the material already covered in this thesis. It highlights examples of a more active expression of anarchistic opposition. It explores further the significant intersections with anarchism that were manifested in radical environmentalism and in anti-capitalism. It emphasises that such activist currents nonetheless engage in critical theoretical reflections of their practices, and furthermore do so by drawing on the ideas of the Situationists. It provides a further example of the way in which texts are used by currents whose primary focus is direct action, and how the past, in the ideas of the Situationists, continues to inform activist currents. Finally, it provides analyses of cultural and symbolic<sup>2</sup> expressions of oppositions, and considers the legacy of the Situationists in relation to these

The first section considers radical environmentalism in Britain in the 1990s, and the second moves to a discussion of anti-capitalism.

### **Radical environmentalism in Britain, 1990s**

This account draws on my own 'observant participation' during the period of the early to mid-1990s when radical environment currents became prominent in the UK, and provides background contextualisation to the analyses of text and action which follow, allowing a sense of the intersections between anarchism, into which the Situationist project has been absorbed, and radical environmental groups such as Earth First! and Reclaim the Streets

#### *Earth First!*

Earth First! (EF) formed in Britain in 1991, inspired by Earth First! in the USA, which was prominent from the 1980s, but wanting to jettison the more reactionary elements in the American version (which started out with American flags and a "rednecks for wilderness"

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<sup>2</sup> I need to be clear that anarchism has, according to David Weir (1997), a long tradition of intervening in the sphere of culture, and that the Situationist influence in anarchism builds on a already pre-existing tendency. To give one example of the Situationists' explicit concern with cultural rather than purely political intervention, they wrote

To the question, why have we promoted such an impassioned regrouping in this cultural sphere whose present reality we reject? the answer is: Because culture is the centre of meaning of a society without meaning. This empty culture is at the heart of an empty existence, and the reinvention of a project of generally transforming the world must also and first of all be posed on this terrain. To give up demanding power in culture would be to leave that power to those who now have it.' (*Internationale Situationiste* 5 Dec 1960 in Knabb ed 1981 p 61)

identity) A group of environmental activists came together under the name of EF! to combine radical action and social justice issues (Bowers and Torrance 2001). Two of the initiators in this were students in Hastings, Sussex, Jake Bowers and Jason Torrance. By 1992, there were 50 local groups of hundreds of supporters, using 'Gandhi-style disobedience' (ibid.). From 1992, their presence at Twyford Down anti-road protest site, in 18 months of direct action, raised their profile, as did other road protest actions from Solsbury Hill, near Bath, to the M11, East London (see below, Claremont Road).

EF! continue to hold winter and summer gatherings in Britain, and there are still many local groups, who rotate responsibility for the bulletin *Action Update*. Another periodical produced annually by a group based in Brighton and originally part of Earth First! is *Do or Die: Voices from the Ecological Resistance*, a book-sized annually produced journal which gathers together accounts of activism from around the world, together with more theoretical articles and book reviews.

My own initial encounter with Earth First! was in 1992, when many of them, mostly from Sussex, attended an inaugural meeting in London of the Social Ecology Network, formed after a collection of names attending the lecture tour by Murray Bookchin. At the meeting, those from EF!, mostly young people, with an unusually high proportion of women, were well versed in principles of non-hierarchy, and questioned aspects of the organisation of workshops and plenary sessions (for example, they raised the issue that it was not possible for the smaller groups to report back at the plenary session and appear to speak for all the diversity of views represented in the smaller groups).

Earth First! material, in texts and flyers, was also in evidence at the Anarchist Book Fair from the mid-1990s, and the organiser of the book fair commented on the high level of organisation which he had noticed amongst EF! participants - both in their use of the internet to broadcast information about protests, and their laying on of facilities such as coaches to take people to protest sites such as anti-roads.

### *Reclaim the Streets*

Reclaim the Streets, a London offshoot of Earth First!, formed in 1994 with their signature theme of street parties to reclaim urban space. Many participated in the 'No M11' occupation of Claremont Road, East London in 1994 (see below), and reformed afterwards for further interventions around the idea of street parties and 'carnival against capitalism', employing loud sound systems, dance and carnivalesque. In July 1996, they staged a street party on a London motorway, on which tree saplings were planted on the road, in holes dug into the tarmac with the use of jackhammers, hidden under wooden tripods clad in long hooped skirts and topped with people, with the noise of drilling drowned out by the techno music. (Jordan and Whitney 2001; Jordan 1998 in McKay ed 1998).



Reclaim the Streets also joined the Liverpool dockers in a March for Social Justice in London, April 1997, in which the march converged in Trafalgar Square for a street party. They were also involved in devising the theme for May Day 2000 in London, when demonstrators dug up turf on Parliament Square and planted a garden with pond.

Their idea of reclaiming urban space through 'party and protest' has become an inspiration in other parts of the world, and Reclaim the Streets groups now exist in cities from Sydney to New York to Dublin.

My initial encounter with Reclaim the Streets was via their intersections with the anarchist movement: members attended anarchist discussions, held large meetings and took stalls at the Anarchist Book Fair from the late 1990s. After their action on the London Motorway in 1996, in which trees were planted on the road, their presence was well known amongst anarchists, some of who recounted the action with delight (eg. London Anarchist Forum April 1997, conversations in the pub after a talk).

### **Claremont Road, East London, 'No M11' protest**

This section begins with an account of the anti-road protest occupation of Claremont Road. This provides a contextual background to the text, produced by participants to celebrate and reflect on the actions, which is discussed below as an example of the continuing influence of the Situationists in activist milieux. The discussion then moves to analysing symbolic actions that emerged in the occupation.

During 1994, anti-road protestors, including some who had previously collaborated in Reclaim the Streets, occupied houses in an East London street, Claremont Road, which was due to be demolished to make way for the M11 motorway. The occupation continued a wave of anti-road protest in Britain, starting with Twyford Down in 1992.

Claremont Road was occupied by protestors and residents, who resisted eviction for several months in 1994. They fortified the houses from attack by bailiffs, with barricades and earth-filled rooms. Tunnels were built linking each house, to provide communality and as a means of evading eviction. A cafe was run and communal meals prepared. Artworks were made, in the street and in the houses, expressing opposition to roads, cars and modern life (eg. an old car was planted with grass, and a road was painted over a basin in a bathroom).

After the eviction in December 1994, two texts were produced by participants to document and celebrate the Claremont Road protest. One, a newspaper containing photographs celebrating the events with captions and a few articles (*Claremont Road. A festival of resistance* 1995). The other a pamphlet, contained some theoretical articles, explaining that 'political interpretation is necessary because to understand the significance of what we're doing helps us to do it better' (*the End of the Beginning* 1995). I want to discuss one article as an illustration of theoretical reflect on on activist practice.

In the article, by John (of the Brighton-based autonomist/Marxist/Situationist journal *Aufheben*), a critique is made of traditional left labourist theory, which would see the anti-roads struggle principally as a location for the recruitment of individuals to the party.<sup>3</sup> In this leftist view, the party is thought to be the real agent for the real struggle, to take place in future. John also discards eco-reformism on the grounds of its faith in the parliamentary system of democracy and its belief that ecological issues are compatible with capitalism. What both positions have in common is that they both, he argues, 'look outside of ourselves and our struggles for the real agent of change, the real historical subject: leftists look to 'the party' while eco-reformists look to Parliament' (ibid. p.72)

Struggles, such as the anti-roads protest movement, though they do not necessarily contest capitalism, may connect, he argues, to a critique of capitalism. The examples of autonomous living created during the Claremont Road occupation allowed a self-invented mode of existence that was an alternative to the capitalist system - through squatting, direct action against construction equipment, communal living through shared housing and meals, unpaid participation by carpenters and other skilled workers (ie. outside of the wage economy). It was not only houses that were reclaimed but also the road itself: the artworks built on the tarmac subsequently ensured that the road became a no-go area for the police, who, initially, had patrolled the road, knocking over the objects which filled the street (ibid. pp.74-5).

John of *Aufheben*, as author of this piece, theorises actions at Claremont as a community of resistance with positive pointers to the kind of social relation that would involve no money, wage labour, work discipline or social control (p.75). The language appears to be directly influenced by the Situationists, Barrot and Camatte, though only the Situationists, particularly Vaneigem, are cited at the end of the article. The author writes, for example, of the creative process at Claremont Road as attempting to assert 'something different', which is a phrase used by Barrot (see Chapter 5).

Where the author cites Vaneigem, he writes, 'Many of the themes of the No M11 struggle resonate with those found in the writing of the Situationists. Their concern with pleasure, art, humour, critique/satire of consumerism, "self-realization" and "wholeness" are all captured in the opposition "*life versus survival*": 'survival does not correspond to the spontaneity, love, creativity, humour, comradeship, commitment, risk-taking and Hegelian/existential leaps into the unknown etc of *living*. Survival is merely existence within the purposes of an alien and parasitic power, living is the very reverse of this – it is the negation of this encroaching power through conscious joyous resistance' (pp 75-76)

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<sup>3</sup> Such is the current drive of the SWP's Globalise Resistance, recruiting students under the banner of anti-capitalism.

A footnote refers to Vaneigem's slogans, "The desire to live is a political decision", and the well-known quote from Vaneigem's text (also used as wall writing in May 68, and on a T-shirt produced by anarchists in the early 1990s):

"People who talk about revolution and class struggle without referring explicitly to everyday life, without understanding what is subversive about love and what is positive in the refusal of constraints – such people have a corpse in their mouth." (Vaneigem 1983 quoted on p.76).

This is followed by a critique of both Situationist theory and of the No M11 campaign, both of which, he argues, have an inadequate critique of commodity production and capitalist crisis (on which the journal *Aufheben* generally draws on Marx's economic categories and terminology). The article concludes with a critique of the way in which Claremont Road became 'just another alternative squat' in the way it attracted more and more marginal non-local identities from the 'brew crew' to sub-criminals and disaffected youth (p 83). (See Chapter 2 for more discussion on the 'brew crew' element at anarchist events and protest sites).

The discussion, by John of *Aufheben*, forms a celebratory and critical evaluation of the No M11 occupation of Claremont Road, and draws on Situationist theory. Key terms which have become influential in the reflections by Reclaim the Streets participants on their practice, and which can be traced to the Situationists, are the notions of resistance as 'joy' and pleasure. For example, two RTS participants, writing on RTS and anti-capitalist carnival against capitalism, refer to resistance through joy (Jordan and Whitney 2001). Situationist ideas, and possibly their concern to evoke an emotional response in readers (see Chapter 4), appear to have filtered down, several decades later, to inform oppositional theory and practice.

#### *Claremont Road: Symbolic and cultural actions and the legacy of the Situationists*

The author, John of *Aufheben*, whose text is discussed above, explicitly reflects on the themes of the NoM11 struggle which resonate with those found in the writing of the Situationists, from who work he derives the opposition "life versus survival", a common theme in Situationist texts (The End of the Beginning 1995 p.75) He highlights themes that resonate - the Situationist concern with pleasure, art, humour, critique/satire of consumerism, as well as 'self-realization' and 'wholeness', spontaneity, love, creativity, humour, comradeship of living, 'conscious joyous resistance' as the negation of mere 'survival' in the existing world 'within the purposes of an alien and parasitic power' (ibid pp.75-6)

Examples of these elements in the occupation of Claremont Road are many. The autonomous activity, outside of the wage labour system (not just by protesters but in the gifts of food by local people, and the participation by local carpenters and other skills) created a new way of relating outside the capitalist market. The artworks on the street, such as the old car planted with grass symbolising the regrowth of plant life that could replace the system of roads, cars and motorised transport, both added a cultural dimension and helped reclaim the space from police

hostility. The netting strung over the road and the 100 foot tower, built by participants, were primarily means of resisting the bailiffs, but also provided a further means of reclaiming the space. The occupation created a communal way of living, with shared space and meals, including those in the self-organised cafe, and conviviality through music, such as song and guitar playing (ie. with more popular cultural and folk music notes, as compared with the wafts of Chopin played on the piano outside the Sorbonne – see Chapter 3).

Inside the squatted houses, there was expression through visual images, again reflecting that the occupation intervened in the area of culture that the Situationists advocated. An Undercurrents (alternative media) video of the occupation (Undercurrents 1995) shows a painting of a road over a basin, an image which captures something of the protesters' anger to the destruction of the terraced homes to make way for a road; and a wall is covered in different hand prints in paint, symbolic personal imprints which express their presence in the houses due for demolition, and an impression of their individuality and collectivity – prints from unique individuals expressing their individuality, imprinted together, collectively, on a wall.

The Claremont Road occupations enact an example of Guy Debord's notion of extending the non-mediocre life, 'to reduce the empty moment of life as much as possible', and the enactment of a game. For Debord the situationist game is 'distinguished from the class conception of the game by its radical negation of the element of competition and of separation from everyday life.' (Debord 1957 'Towards a Situationist International' in Knabb ed 1983 pp.23-24). The element of competition is negated in the Claremont Road occupation in their commitment to non-hierarchical organisation; with the common goal of resisting eviction and the road building plan, they were engaged in actions outside of the competitive world, for jobs, money, security, consumer goods, that characterises modern capitalism. The separation from everyday life that Debord wishes to negate is also relevant to the 'No M11' protest in that everyday life is recreated in the communal and convivial space of the protest site. The notion of a game, alluded by Debord in the quote above the Situationist game, is highlighted explicitly by one participant in the Claremont Road protest, Phil McLeish. In an account published in a text celebrating the occupation, McLeish writes of the campaign as a game, 'an elaborate game, one which we had carefully prepared, a game to unveil power and make visible real issues' (Phil McLeish 'A view from the tower' 1995 *Claremont Road E11: A Festival of Resistance*)

### Anti-capitalism

When the demonstrations in Seattle, November 1999, gained international attention through news headlines, people seemed taken by surprise. The news journalist from Time ('Who are these guys anyway?', quoted in Slyk 2000 p. 56) seemed to speak for much of the mainstream (though the question was asked primarily of the anarchist and Black Bloc element). The reality is that the global network of grassroots groups that solidified their links and mutual solidarity in later 1990s, initially under the rubric of 'anti-capitalism', had roots in struggles in the global

South and North that had much earlier origins: from the uprising in the Chiapas, southern Mexico, from which the Zapatista movement formed from 1994, to the Karnataka farmers movement in southern India; to Reclaim the Streets in London; to the movement against privatization in Bolivia (see *Do or Die* 8 p.4, Graeber 2002; Goaman forthcoming 2003). The first meeting of Peoples Global Action, an umbrella group helping to coordinate global links, took place in Geneva in 1998<sup>4</sup>. The direct action of radical environmentalists of the 1990s and the subsequent idea of converging at economic summits for international protest, was inspired by the actions, for example, of the Karnataka farmers, whose Gandhian direct actions included dismantling machinery at a seed plant of US corporation Union Carbide in Karnataka (see Goaman 2003).

The first global day of action arising out of this new collaboration of international activists, was June 18, 1999. I will give a brief background to this event, since it forms the focus of the text discussed below as an example of reflections on activism which draw directly on Situationist and post-Situationist texts.

#### **Day of Global Action: Carnival against capitalism, June 18, 1999**

The rising momentum of actions was the background to the idea for the international day of action, targeting financial and banking districts around the world, planned for June 18, 1999. The initial idea arose in 1998 out of conversations between people in Britain involved in Reclaim the Streets and the anarchist group London Greenpeace. The idea was raised and discussed at public meetings in which both groups were present, alongside others ranging from the Mexico Support Group to McLibel and Class War; the idea was also discussed at the Earth First! Summer Gathering August 1998. An e-mail discussion list was set up, and, as the event drew nearer, texts, including leaflets, posters and flyers were printed and distributed to publicize the event (*Do or Die* 8 pp.6-10)<sup>5</sup>. One of the flyers publicizing June 18 included a quote, from Situationist Raoul Vaneigem, which proclaimed:

“To work for delight and authentic festivity is barely distinguishable from preparing for general insurrection” (quote used on flyer, see *ibid.* p.10)

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<sup>4</sup> Over 300 delegates attended including. Uwa peoples of Columbia, Canadian Postal Workers, European Reclaim the Streets activists, anti-nuclear campaigners, French farmers (the Confederation Paysanne, of which Jose Bove is a part), Maori activists, Ogoni activists, Korean Trade Unionists, Indigenous Women's Network of North America, Ukrainian radical ecologists (*Do or Die* 8 p.4). People's Global Action was formed, and a PGA Convenors Committee meeting was held in Finland in September 1998. Events were co-ordinated to target the annual meetings of the eight most industrialised nations (G8) and of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and from 1998 these began to manifest themselves across the globe. PGA met in Bangalore, India, in August 1999 (*Do or Die* 8 pp.3-4, *SchNEWS* 156, 226, 240, 250 (3 3.2000)), gaining momentum from the events of June 18, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Accounts of the background to anti-capitalism and the formation of the PGA, and of the preparations to June 18 Day of global action, are themselves documented in self-organised independently published texts (*Do or Die*, compilations of *SchNEWS*) This attests to the role of texts in communicating ideas and documenting the history and process of developing actions





Cover of *SchQUALL*, an anthology combining *Schnews* and *Squall*, both of which are sources of independent news available in print and online. The photographs show an action to pull up genetically modified crops (top) and a scene from the events of June 18, 1999, in London (bottom).



The flyers were available at numerous gigs held to raise awareness and money, and the 50,000 flyers printed were distributed in one month, along with 10,000 posters.

The use of a Situationist quote on a flyer illustrates how writing and print, and inspiration drawn from the Situationists with the use of a quote are used to disseminate ideas and attract participants. This will become evident also in the text discussed below which reflects on the events of June 18, and provides further evidence of the way in which texts, and a relationship to the past, and in this case to the Situationists, informs such activist currents.

### Reflections on June 18

The pamphlet *reflections on june 18* was originally devised as a discussion booklet to be produced, by participants in London, before the day of action, which targeted financial institutions in the city of London on June 18, 1999. The pamphlet materialised afterwards, since some potential contributors wanted to see how the events turned out before writing evaluations. It was distributed widely, for free with donations accepted, including at a Reclaim the Streets meeting at the Anarchist Book Fair October 1999.

One article, 'Give Up Activism', draws heavily on Vaneigem and on Camatte (see Chapter 5) in a critique of the roles and stereotypes of an activist mentality. The article became influential in activist circles and was translated into several languages including French and Spanish (*Do or Die* 9 pp.160-170, in which the article was reprinted). It is discussed here as an example of a critical evaluation of activist currents, and one which draws on past theory – of the Situationists and post-Situationist Camatte.

The anonymous South Downs Earth First! (SDEF!) author draws on Vaneigem's critique of roles and stereotypes and of the militant to argue against an activist mentality. The role of the activist, another specialist or expert, needs to be rejected as just another stereotyped role, 'a strange psychological form which we use to define ourselves and our relation to others'. The example of the stereotyped identity which emerged in the anti-roads protest movement is used: at the first major anti-road protest site, Twyford Down, there was initially a diversity of people including Ramblers. As media coverage tended to print photographs of dreadlocked countercultural types, this attracted more of them, and more ordinary people stayed away. The media attention given to protestor 'Swampy' in 1997 resulted in a replication of 'eco-warrior' stereotyped attitudes in people drawn to the the sites (*reflections on june 18* p.3).

The author quotes Vaneigem's *Revolution of Everyday Life* extensively in order to explore his critique of roles and stereotypes two examples are

"we succumb to the seduction of borrowed attitudes"

“A real revolution will involve a breaking out of all preconceived roles and...the destruction of all specialism – the reclamation of our lives” (ibid. p 3)

Another influential critique by Vaneigem, used here (and also in *Anti Clock-wise*, see Chapter 7) is that of the militant working for the Party, and of the sacrifice involved in this. Again Vaneigem is much quoted to support the case: for example:

“The time they [the militant entering the service of a Cause] have for creative activity they squander on handing out leaflets, putting up posters, demonstrating or heckling politicians. They become militants, fetishizing action because others are doing their thinking for them.” (p.4)

The author argues that the activist role separates the person from other people, and that activists concentrate on making links with other activists rather than other people; again Vaneigem is quoted.

“The specialist...enrols himself in order to enrol others”

“Revolution is made everyday despite, and in opposition to, the specialists of revolution” (p.4)

The author then turns to post-Situationist Camatte and his notion of ‘all groups are gangs’ (an influential critique, see *Here and Now* Chapter 8). The author likens activist milieux to the leftist sects targeted by Camatte, who sees them as acting as a vanguard and as defining themselves by exclusion, with members’ loyalty being to the group rather than to the struggle. The group as ‘gang’ is an illusory community, distracting us from creating a wider community of resistance.

The author then turns back to Vaneigem to argue that activism reproduces the structure of present society in its operations, quoting Vaneigem to say that,

“When the rebel begins to believe that he is fighting for a higher good, the authoritarian principle gets a filip.” (p.5)

The author concludes by acknowledging that it may be that the marginalisation of activists in a special separate group may be inevitable when opposition is contracted, and that this may only be corrected in the event of

‘a general upsurge in struggle when we won’t be weirdos and freaks any more but will seem simply to be stating what is on everybody’s minds.’ (p.5)

The author states however that activism is nonetheless problematic and is a political form suited to liberal reformism that is being pushed beyond its limits. S/he writes:



'Historically, those movements that have come the closest to de-stabilising or removing or going beyond capitalism have not at all taken the form of activism.' (p.6)

The article 'Give Up Activism' has been discussed to show the role of theory via self published texts, in activist currents; the use of the past (Situationist theory from the 1960s; post-Situationist theory from the 1970s); and a re-evaluation of such past theory in the light of contemporary manifestations. Vaneigem's critique of the militant working for the Cause – the Party –, and Camatte's 'all groups are gangs' critique of political groups, are invoked for their relevance to current collaborations of activists in environmental (eg. road protest) groups and anti-capitalism.

### **Anti-capitalist demonstrations and symbolic action: Situationist themes explored**

After the day of global action, June 18, 1999, anti-capitalist demonstrations at large summits gained increasing momentum, erupting around the world and drawing tens of thousands of protesters (100,000 at Seattle 1999, 10,000 in Prague 2000; 300,000 in Genoa 2001 [source: [www.indymedia.org](http://www.indymedia.org)]).

I explore below key themes that have emerged through the summit demonstrations, and that connect to Situationist ideas. I begin with an account of the origins of the pink and silver section and of the Black bloc, both now familiar manifestations at large summit demonstrations. I then select key themes - play, fun and pleasure, detournement, subversion and parody, subjectivity, and the disruption of routine (which has a long tradition in the avant garde and is an element in the 'construction of situations' advocated by the Situationists). I discuss these in relation to a range of anti-capitalist phenomena.

### *Pink and silver bloc and Tactical Frivolity*

The themes of the Pink and Silver bloc and the notion of 'Tactical Frivolity', and the samba band which often accompanies the bloc, are now a regular presence at demonstrations against large summits. The inspirations were consolidated in the run-up to the demonstrations against the World Bank and IMF in Prague, September 2000. Participants gathering at the Earth First! summer gathering, Britain, 2000, discussed ideas for further inspiring their project of protest through carnival. A samba band, Rhythms of Resistance, was formed.<sup>6</sup> One participant, Rosie from Bristol, voiced the themes of Pink and Silver as denoting 'pink for passion, silver for clarity' (personal communication, Greg 2002)

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<sup>6</sup> Rhythms of Resistance took its cue from the already formed Barking Battery, a samba band based at University of East London, which had formed on inspiration from a samba band supporting a demonstration of Liverpool dockers and Reclaim the Streets in 1997 (personal communication 2002, from anthropologist Chris Knight, who plays in both the Barking Battery and Rhythms of Resistance, and is secretary of the London Samba School.) This rippling of inspiration precedes a further rippling as the anti-capitalist movement gained global momentum: samba bands formed in many cities around the world and participated in demonstrations. A comparison can be made to the communication of the themes of the Pink and Silver bloc to summits in other European countries, as discussed above

The keynote themes of pink and silver costumes and feather dusters, and the samba band, are now well established at large summit demonstrations. For example, there were relatively few of the original British participants from the Prague action both in Genoa, July 2001 and in Oslo, June 2002, and yet large Pink and Silver sections formed consisting mainly of local people. An Indymedia reporter wrote of the Pink bloc in Oslo: 'they were lovely to look at, accompanied by a big dragon and several big dolls, they kind of ruled the streets.' (ZCat 24 06.02 www.indymedia.org) This communication of an ethos of carnival and a set of cultural symbols, without any deliberate orchestration, demonstrates the power of such participatory notions of play and pleasure to spread beyond national boundaries, recreated at successive events through imitation.

The Pink and Silver bloc consist mainly of women, dressed in an array of carnivalesque costumes, some of them reproducing the signature theme of pink fantails secured upwards behind the back. The dresses worn tend towards a fantasy of mythical narrative - fairy tales meet pantomime - with tight bodices, gauzy skirts and feather dusters parading as wands, (see Goaman forthcoming 2003a). Whatever the Situationist themselves might think of the imagery employed (and I have heard one teenager, expressing a certain consternation with the Pink and Silver themes, remark that they need more dignity and look rather like a 'drag queens' nightmare'), they nonetheless embody the notions of play, fun, pleasure and symbolic culture that are aspects of the Situationist project of intervention in culture rather than purely in the sphere of politics.

Pink and Silver bloc participants show a high level of theoretical awareness of the purpose of their actions. As stated in a leaflet on their intentions, which was handed out in Genoa, July 2001:

'We are a colourful party in the street, a carnival with theatre, pink fairies and radical cheerleaders, clowns and music, a creative, magical and confrontational dance that takes decisions in a horizontal manner through affinity groups. We want to reduce aggressivity to the minimum with imagination, samba, art, playing with space (and with the police), to create a relaxed atmosphere with good vibes. While we dance we denounce the brutality of capitalism, patriarchy, racism and all forms of oppression and domination, denying any legitimacy to those 8 men who meet as if the world belonged to them and they could exploit and destroy at their will.' (Genoa pink bloc leaflet text, quoted in Chesters and Welsh 2001).

The effect of the Pink and Silver bloc, with its playful carnivalesque, music and dance and feminine costumes revealing the vulnerable human form, forms a counter-image to that of brutality, bureaucracy and power. News footage (Channel 4 26-27 September 2000) of the Prague demonstrations shows the Pink and Silver bloc find a scarcely guarded section outside the conference centre: pink fairies below wave feather dusters at temporarily retreating policeman, while suited bureaucrats look down from the building. The juxtaposition seems to evoke the intended effect - to expose and de-legitimate the power of bureaucrats, corporations

and world leaders. It is not the carnival of fairies and raggle taggle protesters below who look ridiculous - it is the conference delegates, gazing in isolation, almost imprisonment, down from their concrete balconies, the face of bureaucratic and corporate power exposed. This is an enactment of a playful version of the Situationist-style slogan used in *Anti Clock-work* (see Chapter 7): 'Ridicule is our greatest weapon because we live in a ridiculous world.'

In line with the Situationist project, if the de-legitimation of power occurs it is through a version of a constructed 'situation' - creating the contrast between living self organised action drawing on cultural and symbolic imagery, and bureaucratic life, whose emptiness the living movement seeks to expose.

A similar juxtaposition occurs in Seattle, when delegates of the World Trade Organization conference are confronted by protesters whose aim is to block their way. As a protester explains, face-to-face, to delegates that they are trying something different as part of their demonstration against the WTO, the facial expressions of delegates caught on video are bemused and embarrassed, as though experiencing their power as exposed and de-legitimised for the first time. (RIP WTO N30 video: Oregon).

### *The Black Bloc*

The Black Bloc is a tactic rather than a group and has its origins in the punk, anti-nuclear protests and autonomist movements of late 1970s in Europe (Slyk 2000 p.54). According to Slyk, from the 'counter-cultural cauldron' that was the mass squatters/autonomist movement and disenfranchised youth, grew an increasing radical politics:

'Heavier police enforcement at demonstrations together with surveillance of activists, had forced groups like Earth First! and Animal Liberation Front, then in their infancy, to mask up and go underground with their actions. Borrowing these techniques and adding others, including black apparel, anarchists reinvigorated themselves, flanked with the newly created black bloc. Less than a decade later, the first black blocs formed in North America' (Slyk 2000 p.54)

The Black Bloc carry out property damage against key symbols of capitalism - banks, shops (particularly corporate-owned shops), and cars. Paul Hawken sees the smashing of windows by the Black Bloc in Seattle as a tactic 'intended to break the spells cast by corporate hegemony, an attempt to shatter the smooth exterior facade that covers corporate crime and violence' (Hawken 2000 p.25). This is an evocative interpretation which expresses the symbolic purpose of the shattered windows.

The images of shattered windows take on an aesthetic form. One woman, staring at a smashed window with Christmas displays inside, is approached by a *Seattle Times* journalist. Presumably to his surprise, the woman tells of her admiration. 'That's really beautiful', she tells him, and when asked why, explains 'I just like the way the glass broke' (quoted in Slyk 2000 p.55). Such aestheticization is one method of recuperation, rendering the transformatory impulse behind such acts into an aesthetic, neutralised form. Nonetheless, the response was not what the

reporter wanted (apparently, according to Slyk, the “art house” response’ did not sit well with the reporter [ibid]), which attests to some appreciation, on the part of the art-house woman and the reporter, of the intention to attack symbols of capitalism.

This notion of property damage as, in part, an aesthetic image, as disrupting and literally smashing the shiny gloss that is the material form of capitalist routine existence, is also reached for in an evocative description of the aftermath of the Genoa demonstrations against the G8, when locals survey the smashed up areas of the city. From a book published in the anarchist milieu, the following account by one participant, Brian S., describes the scene as locals walked the streets, wandering through the burned ruins of banks and cars.

‘People were picking at a melted/smashed banking machine, curious to see what one looks like from the inside.

‘Contents of bank files and drawers were scattered about with the ashes, photocopiers were melted, sleek cars were black and crushed with odd assorted flags and garbage protruding from them.

‘In a weird way, it seemed as if everyone was totally fascinated and unable to speak. No one was really condemning it or shaking their heads. It was more like bewilderment and curiosity. It’s not often that one gets to see what lies behind the sleek machines and walls that run our lives.

‘It was kinda like seeing something you’ve been taught to respect and fear, become nothing but flimsy garbage. Not even a security guard, cop or fireman around to keep people away. Feels really artsy or something saying it but it was kinda like a caged animal having their cage fall away, and not really understanding what to do next. Hard to describe I guess.

‘I saw a family walking down one of the streets picking things up and putting them in bags. The young girl was collecting gas shells. The boy had picked up several pieces of makeshift armour and bits of flag.’ (Brian S. ‘reporting from the front line’ p 20 in On fire 2001)

The links to May 68, and the burnt-out cars and shop windows subject to the ‘critique of the paving stone’ are clear. An enagement with the physical forms of modern life - cars, shops, banks - elicits a recurring response, from May 68, to the 1990 riot in the Anti-Poll Tax demonstration in London, when cars and ritzy shops were trashed, to the June 18, 1999 day of action in London, in which cars were smashed up, and to successive May Days 2000 to 2001, in which smart cars were targeted, as a symbolic statement against these icons of capitalism and globalisation

I turn now to a wider thematic analysis, connecting to key Situationist elements

### **Play, fun, pleasure**

In addition to the elements of playfulness (feather dusters), fun and pleasure (music and dance, colourful costumes) that are evident in the Tactical Frivolity themes of the Pink and Silver bloc,

discussed above, there are many other examples of these elements on the large summit demonstrations

The Italian Tute Bianche, with their presence at summit demonstrations from Prague 2000 to Genoa 2001, and their fellow travellers based in London, the Wombles, employ an array of padding, cardboard armour, and foam and inflatable 'weaponry', as playful non-violent protective gear in their intentions to push against police lines and defend themselves against attack by police. The link to play, even with a protective purpose, is evident, their gear is similar to the home-made versions used by children when they make cardboard versions of objects, and play with toy or inflatable hammers and truncheons

A similar detournement of objects of play is observable in the hockey sticks, used in the demonstrations in Quebec, April 2001, for a defensive purpose - hitting tear gas canisters launched towards them by police, back to police lines. And in a comparable inversion of weaponry and toys, also in Quebec, a medieval-style launcher is used to lob soft toys the conference centre: soft toys as ammunition is another example of playfulness, subversion, and detournement.

In the day of global action on June 18, 1999 in the city of London, protesters are seen dancing half-naked in and out of the water gushing from a water hydrant in the street. May Day 2000 in London also uses notions of play and pleasure in its reclaiming of the turfed area in Parliament Square, in front of the Houses of Parliament in London, and its transformation into a garden with plants and a pond. This transformation is also a symbolic statement about reclaiming urban spaces for pleasure rather than for the purposes of bureaucratic administration and capitalist circulation of goods and people. It evokes, therefore, the Situationist-inspired slogans seen on walls in Paris, May 68: 'Under the paving stones, the beach'.

### **Detournement/subversion/parody**

Elements of detournement and subversion intertwine with those of play in the examples analysed above. Others include, at American Party Conventions, the Billionaires for Bush (or Gore) - business tycoons dressed in tuxedos and evening gowns, thanking police for repressing dissent and trying to press wads of fake money into their pockets (Graeber 2002 p.67). Such a parody of the corporate world, and the evening dress, confuses police, who do not attack any of the ludic parodic Billionaires

The Revolutionary Anarchist Clown Bloc in the USA ride high bicycles wear rainbow wigs and carry squeaky mallets. With these notes of playfulness, they also confuse the police by attacking each other, or the Billionaires. With further notes of parody, their chants parody those of the traditional left - with chants such as 'Call! Response! Call! Response!' and 'Three Word Chant! Three Word Chant!' (Graeber 2002 p.67). This evokes a similar parodic attitude of earlier Situationists. In 1968, English members of the Situationist International, joining an anti-Vietnam march, subverted the Trotskyists' chants of 'Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh!' with their own

parody of a television advertisement; in a piece of double detournement the Situationists chanted 'Hot chocolate, drinking chocolate!'. Skinheads produced their own parodies of the Trotskyists chants, shouting 'Students, students, ha, ha, ha!' (Vague 2000 p 44).

Other examples of parody used to good effect are the spoof newspapers produced traditionally by Reclaim the Streets to coincide with their actions. A spoof of the London paper *The Evening Standard* is produced to coincide with the March for Social Justice in April 1997. Entitled *Evading Standards* and at first glance indistinguishable from the original, it is full of countercultural texts on do-it-yourself culture, and is confiscated by police while being handed out in Oxford Circus. Another paper, *Financial Crimes*, a skilfully produced spoof of the *Financial Times*, even imitating the pink paper, is produced at the time of the Prague demonstrations, September 2000. In autumn 2001, as the USA begins bombing Afghanistan, Reclaim the Streets produce another newspaper, this time a spoof of *The Sun*, whose title is subverted to *The Spun* (with a play on the word 'spin' which is used so frequently to denote the manipulation of information and propaganda by the public relations arm of the government).

May Day 2000, with the occupation of Parliament Square and its transformation to a garden, also sees the subversion and detournement of a statue of Winston Churchill, who is transformed into a punk, with green turf 'mohican' hair. His status as government and war leader is subverted to that of powerless rebel and punk. The image lives on, swiftly incorporated onto flyers and leaflets by those in the anarchist movement: a caption to the photograph, used on a flyer for the Anarchist Book Fair, October 2000, states 'His finest hour' - a note of humorous subversion well in line with Situationist-style detournement.

Recuperation is a term frequently used by the Situationists, post-Situationists and anarchists, to refer to the process by which capitalism incorporates all opposition and appropriates its ethos for marketing and advertising purposes, thus neutralising its subversive aspects. A blatant example of this, and one topical to this discussion, was one I observed in 2001, when I noticed a woman on the tube with a carrier bag for 'Camper' shoes, which showed a street party in Trafalgar Square (possibly the March for Social Justice 1997) with slogans such as 'reclaim walking' and a slogan advertising Camper shoes directly below.

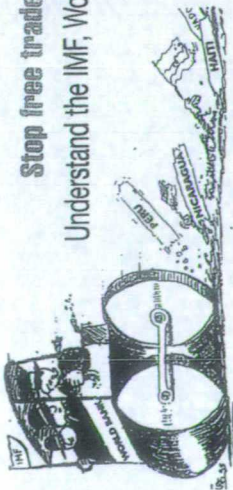
This form of recuperation is also inverted (subverted) by oppositional movements themselves. For example, in the wake of the Gothenburg protest, June 2001, at the EU summit, Tony Blair attempted to dismiss and discredit the protesters by referring to them as 'the anarchist travelling circus'. This was seized on with glee by anti-capitalists and anarchists in Britain, who quickly made the slogan into a banner (seen at the protests against the Arms Trade Fair, London, September 2001), and adopted it to entitle a series of actions planned for spring, 2003. The connotations of play and pleasure in the phrase 'anarchist travelling circus' were attractive to anarchists, who quickly recuperated the words. Another example, in the peace movement, is the 'women in black' who hold anti-war vigils in British cities: the name re-appropriates and subverts the 'men in black', a popular word for USA secret service agents.



www.reclaimthestreets.net

Tuesday September 26 2000

free



Stop free trade rolling

Understand the IMF, World Bank

page 4



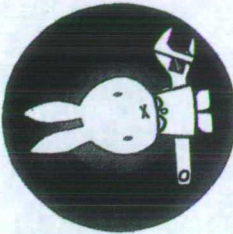
Head in the clouds

Corporate control of weather

and more free trade to solve

climate chaos

Dream on: turn to page 3



Dismantling Capitalism

Your guide to creating a free

and ecological society based on

co-operation and community

More information pages 1-16

PRAGUE MEETING OF THE WORLD BANK AND IMF

## World Bank - terrorism - more evidence

By Heret Volonson and James Kohler

This week 20,000 economists and their followers converge in the Czech capital of Prague, for the 55th annual meeting of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). The meetings are taking place behind closed doors, amid thousands of riot-ready police and army battalions. Outside tens of thousands take to the streets incensed at the effects of World Bank and IMF policies on the environment and those outside the global elite.

The World Bank acts along side NATO to pursue Western powers' interests - the former through loans, the latter through bombs. For example, in 1990, the IMF and World Bank used "shock therapy" to introduce Western-style capitalism to Yugoslavia which led to massive job losses and a rise in ethnic nationalism. The institution has lost control and an alternative

institutions on offer NATO was selected. The Serb leaders were offered a deal called the 'Rambouillet terms', which according to Lord Gilbert, defence minister during the Kosovo war, speaking in the House of Commons last month was "absolutely intolerable" and designed to provoke war.

The truth behind many of the recent events in the Balkans remains obscure. What is clear is that the media was heavily used to manufacture sympathy for the Kosovan Albanians. This was then used to justify the NATO bombings and legitimise the military action necessary to restore business as usual.

Now the institutional baton has been passed back by NATO to the IMF and World Bank to rebuild Kosovo and create "a thriving, open and transparent market economy", as one of their brochures states.

Disastrous 'unforeseen' effects of IMF and World Bank policies

### BUSINESS AS USUAL

**World Bank debt to multinationals**  
A World Bank problem: "We did things for the clients out there in the developing world, but it was more driven by an internally cloned system of thinking rather than a more open, market-oriented approach," says Human Resources manager Pauline Ramprasad. Solution: borrow 57 corporate employees under a new program enabling employee sharing between multinational corporations and the World Bank.

### Weatherman sacked for prediction

A Californian weather forecaster was sacked from a radio station for predicting rain on the day of the corporation's annual picnic. The company sacked their employee after ten years of service for 'failing to predict a sunny day'. It rained.

### Covert employment for SAS

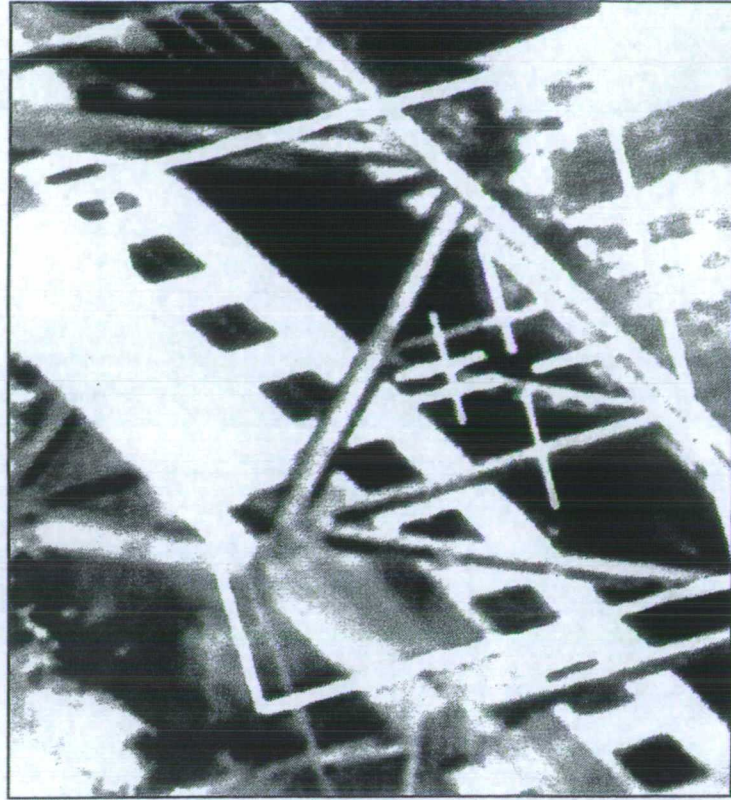
The SAS are being used to train the Benefits Agency fraud squad. Now the Northern Ireland ceasefire is in place, the search for new terrorists seems to be on. Will the benefits fraud squad also be trained to 'shoot to kill'?

### Children on death row

Kids in the US apparently bored of dolls that just wet their nappy and cry now have a new option: Death Row Marv, a 6 inch doll that can be strapped to an electric chair and then she realistically convulses as she is electrocuted to death.

### Unpleasant endings

A Company in San Francisco have discovered a gap in the market - the clean-up of homicide, suicide and accidental death. Crime Scene Cleaner's owner Neal Smithers, 33, said: 'Look, if you come home and find the granddaddy's been



NATO 'smart bomb' targets train full of passengers during Kosovo war.

behaviour to this year's new Terrorism Act definition: "terrorism" means the use or threat of action designed to influence the government or intimidate the public for advancing a political, religious or ideological cause. As long as it also involves serious violence against the person or damage to property; endangers a person's life; creates serious risk to the health and safety of the public; or is designed to seriously disrupt an

needing only slight tinkering to iron out a few injustices. Yet if the institutions are designed to protect an inherently socially and ecologically flawed system then it is the system itself that needs to be dismantled. Groups and individuals are linking up with exactly this aim. As the Canadian Security Intelligence Service concludes, "the philosophy of capitalism also is under attack, facing charges that it is invading the social welfare of



Flyer for the Anarchist Book Fair, using a photograph taken during the actions of May Day 2000. The spontaneous act, by one person, of inverting Churchill's status to that of a punk, via a turf 'mohican', becomes material for further representations of this symbolic critique.

The same photo is used (see next page) on a distribution catalogue, which also includes reflections, both on the media hysteria provoked by the graffiti and critique by turf, and on history itself.

The symbols of the dominant order and the dominant representation of history (Churchill and the Cenotaph, as discussed in the BM Active catalogue) are subjected to a symbolic critique through turf and graffiti. A critical evaluation is made about which acts are appropriate (BM Active catalogue judges in conclusion (p.9, not shown) that some graffiti on the Cenotaph was pointless, but supports one asking 'Why glorify war?'). The symbolic acts themselves, then, become visual images presenting a critique of figureheads of history, and the opportunity to reflect on history. The past and history, represented in this case through statuary, becomes an area of representation subject to critique and re-appropriation.



# His finest hour!

The 19th Annual  
**Anarchist Book Fair**

**Saturday 14 October 2000**  
**10am-6pm**

**Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,  
London WC1 (Holborn tube)**

*Books, CDs, stalls, meetings, videos,  
creche, food and loads more*

<http://freespace.virgin.net/anarchist.bookfair>



'I utterly condemn the violence and destruction of property by mindless thugs.' Ken Livingstone (London Mayor)

It may seem surprising that the politicians responsible for the dropping of 23,000 bombs and missiles on Serbia should be so outraged by the small amount of graffiti and window breaking on the London May Day action. However, hypocrisy is second nature to most politicians. Every Remembrance Day they solemnly lay wreaths at the Cenotaph, pretending to care about the suffering of war. The next day they are back in parliament justifying more violence, whether it is arms sales to repressive regimes or more air raids on Iraq (a country where sanctions have caused a million deaths since 1990).

The Cenotaph was unveiled on Armistice Day 1920, just three weeks after hungry unemployed ex-servicemen had fought running battles with police in Whitehall. Ever since then politicians have manipulated people's grief over war with eulogies to what the Cenotaph refers to as 'The Glorious Dead'.

In an attempt to keep us passive, they endlessly promote the idea that the 'war dead' died for our freedom. No one could seriously argue that the soldiers slaughtered in the trenches died 'glorious'. However, it is a common belief that Two was all about fighting fascism.

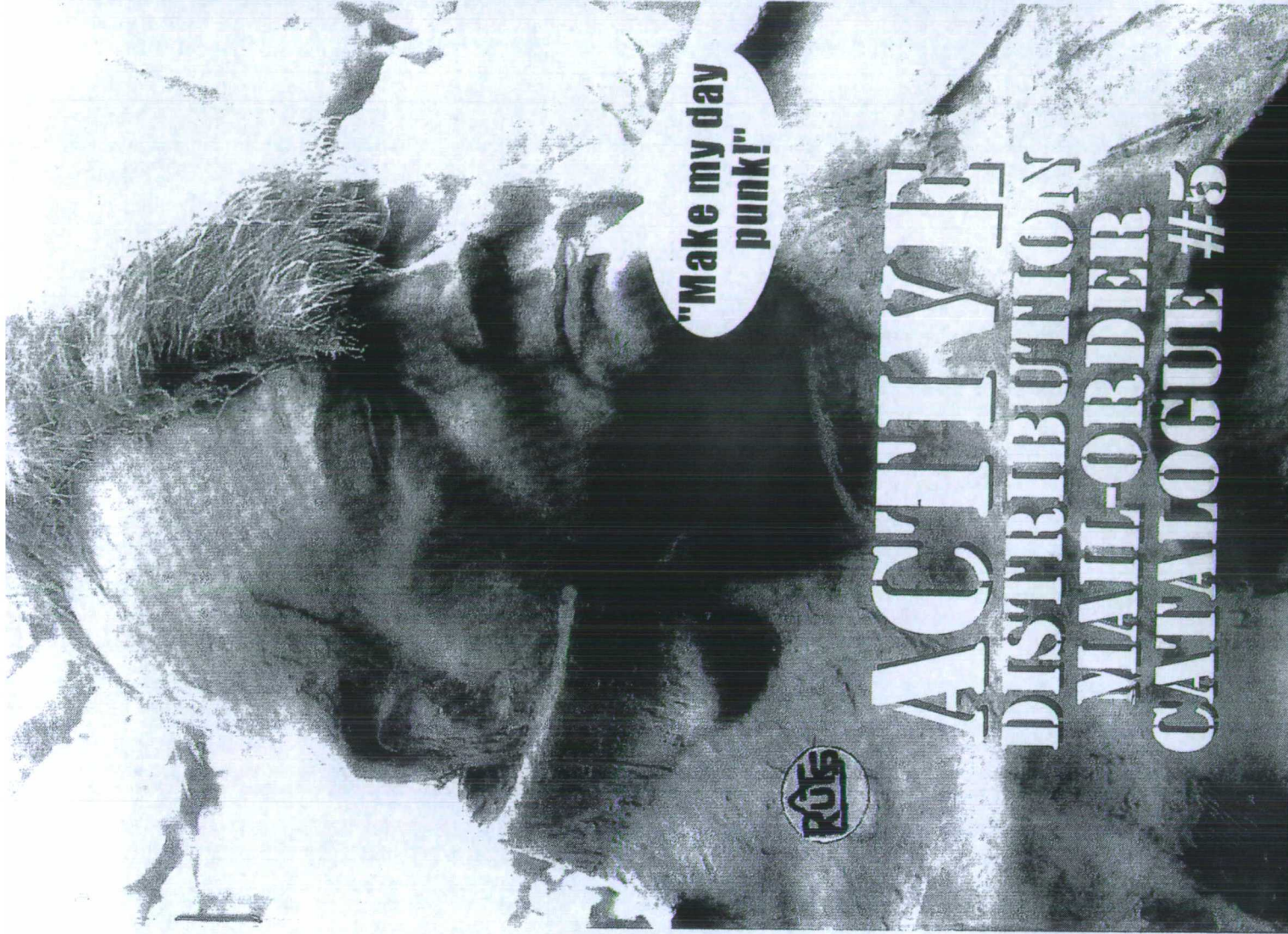
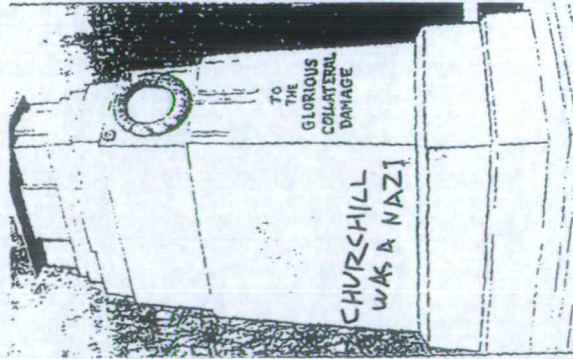
The truth is that Churchill on fascist Italy, while members of and papers like The Daily Mail, supported Hitler. Britain had slaughtered slavery and empire building world and Hitler essentially wanted to do the same in Eastern Europe. He threatened the pre-eminence of the so the British establishment eventually against him.

Even so, WW2 was largely Russia. Stalin had already killed ten by 1940, so his war with Hitler was for freedom. Meanwhile Churchill Normandy landings, hoping that the Russian armies would wear them result was that 20-30 million

ished and millions more died in the concentration camps.

The Allies refused Axis offers to send them Jewish refugees and they never acted on desperate pleas to stop the exterminations by bombing the rail lines to Auschwitz. However, they did make great efforts to bomb German and Japanese cities, killing perhaps a million civilians. The culmination of these atrocities was the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; bombings that were authorised by the 1945 Labour government even though Japan was ready to surrender.

After the war, tens of thousands of German POWs starved to death in Allied prison camps, as did many civilians in a devastated Germany deprived of food aid.





### **Subjectivity**

A protester is seen both at May Day 2001 in London, and at subsequent smaller demonstrations, mostly naked and with the word 'HUMAN' written across his chest. The slogan appears to reclaim his own subjectivity and personhood, his status as a free human being desiring to be free of the trammels of the state and corporate capitalism.

The Pink and Silver bloc actively proclaim their own subjectivity in their playful actions which, when directed towards the police, appear to desire to emphasise their right to exist as free human beings, allowed to demonstrate free of containment and oppression.

### **The disruption of routines**

An element in the avant garde tradition, and forming an aspect of the Situationist project, in the notions of 'derive', 'situations' and 'detournement', is the disruption of the routine of modern everyday life, in order to provoke awareness of its banality and oppressiveness, and to evoke an oppositional response through a taste of an alternative reality. Their texts, as analysed in Chapter 4, also aim to expose the banality of the routine of daily life.

This element of disrupting and breaking through routinised existence in order to expose its brutality, is a theme identified by some commentators on anti-capitalist demonstrations, though without direct reference to the Situationists. Starhawk, for example, sees the large summit demonstrations as acting as a central drama which, through media coverage, awakens people to the processes of globalisation (Starhawk 2000; Goaman forthcoming 2003). Butigan sees them as allowing the familiar to be 'defamiliarised', exposing the routines of global capitalist life (Butigan 2000; Goaman forthcoming 2003).

This is apparent for example in May Day 2002 in London, when anarchists organised a carnivalesque walk through the streets of London's ritziest area, Mayfair. With the intention of avoiding the police containments (Section 60s) which had become a regular means of preventing protest by detaining protesters, the walk formed a version of a 'derive' in which the central aim was to keep moving, blocking traffic wherever the walk meandered. The streets of London, normally noisy and hectic with traffic, shoppers and office workers, were transformed into quiet spaces, disrupting the routines of capitalism and its purpose of bureaucratic administration, wage labour and consumerism. Onlookers looked bemused and curious rather than disapproving as though experiencing the re-appropriation of the space for another purpose for the mingling of a raggle taggle melee of purposeful players who, by expressing anarchistic opposition, disrupted and challenged the routines of modern existence (see Goaman forthcoming 2003).

### **Conclusions**

This chapter has highlighted Situationist themes in action, through analysing the symbolic expressions of subversion, play, detournement and disruption of routines. An Italian protester in the Genoa protests, July 2001, spoke explicitly of the influence of Guy Debord and the Situationists on the symbolic actions of the demonstrations, including the synchronised laughing at the moment when the G8 were being photographed (Hari 2001 p.11)

The texts, produced by participants to reflect on actions, refer explicitly to Situationist texts in their discussion, and attest to the direct and conscious influence of Situationist ideas, on contemporary anarchists and anti-capitalists, some thirty to forty years later.

It is notable that the Situationist influence can be traced at many turns in the upsurge of oppositional activity which the anti-globalisation movement represents. Not only have Situationist texts been explicitly used to reflect on practice by radical environmental and anti-capitalist currents, but Situationist ideas also echo in the symbolic actions of demonstrations. A prominent figure in the anti-capitalist movement internationally is the American author and activist, Starhawk<sup>7</sup>, who also refers to the Situationists as informing aspects of her ideas. Another illustration of the way in which the Situationists appear never to be very far away is the re-emergence of René Riesel in what is broadly the anti-capitalist movement. René Riesel, who, with the Enrages, was closely linked to the Situationists in May 68 (see Chapter 3), resurfaces in the late 1990s as a contemporary co-collaborator with José Bové (see below) in the Confederation Paysanne and in an action to destroy genetically-modified crops.

It is significant that three prominent figureheads of the anti-capitalist movement - Marcos, José Bové and Starhawk - represent, in differing ways, a relationship to the *past*, that forms a key theme in this thesis. Subcomandante Marcos is a charismatic leader of the Zapatista struggle in the Chiapas, which has provided a strong inspiration and point of origin for the anti-capitalist movement (see for example Graeber 2002). Marcos spearheads the Zapatista movement to defend *indigenous* ways of life. José Bové's a prominent participant of anti-capitalist summit demonstrations and is also well-known for his actions against a McDonalds in his neighbouring town in southern France, and for actions against genetically modified crops. He has been represented, by the media in France and beyond, as something of a 'pop icon of the resistance against global trade liberalisation' (*Anarchy* Spring-Summer 2000 p.10). Bové therefore represents the resistance against modern intensive agriculture and junk food, and the defence of traditional organic agriculture which he himself practices. Bové, born 1953, also forms a link to May 68, when he began his oppositional activity while still at school. His perspectives also

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<sup>7</sup> Starhawk, in propounding her fusion of anarchy, spiritualism, magic and therapy, cites the Situationists as one influence, in particular their idea of creating situations in which people will have to confront certain things and change. That's sort of how I approach therapy. What I do is create a situation in which someone can change' (Starhawk quoted in *Bulletin of Anarchist Research* 3 March 1988 p.7). This appears to inform both her actions and her writings.

overlap with those discussed in Chapter 11 on *Fifth Estate*: Bové<sup>8</sup> studied philosophy at the University of Bordeaux, where Jacques Ellul, a key influence in *Fifth Estate*, was an influential teacher. Bove regards Ellul as ‘the first to theorize the autonomy of technology, to show how both the state and the economy are creatures of a technology which has its own logic’ (Bove and Dufour 2001 p.35). Starhawk, another participant of large summit demonstrations, on which she writes eloquent reflections (see for example [www.starhawk.com](http://www.starhawk.com) and the Reclaim the Streets and PGA websites [rts@gn.apc.org; www.agp.org]), advocates magical, ritual, shamanistic and practices, such as are practised by small-scale ‘primitive’ societies, in her fusion of anarchy, spiritualism and holism to transform consciousness. The projects of three prominent anti-globalisation figures, then, signify the defence and/or reclaiming of the past (indigenous ways of life, traditional food and farming methods, and in Starhawk’s project, magical ritual practices)

In the actions analysed in this chapter, the Situationist influence may act more as the absorption of an attitude, an ethos, which has become more explicit in anarchistic currents. This absorption has been further enabled through the intentional activities of anarchist individuals, concerned to translate and publish Situationist texts and maintain them in print by anarchist small press imprints. Situationist ideas continue to resonate: their critique of commodity culture and the spectacle is more relevant than ever, and their critique of hierarchical relations, and the separation and alienation this entails, is a key element in the anti-capitalist movement, which, as Graeber argues, has anarchism at its heart (Graeber 2002 p.62).

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<sup>8</sup> In relation to Marcos and Bové the story goes that when the two met, each exchanged a pipe (both are pipe-smokers) (announcement by George Monbiot at the launch of Jose Bove’s book *The World is Not for Sale* Camden Centre London 12/06/01). Such is the weaving of legends by more mainstream commentators: anarchist and post Situationist strands tend to have more contempt for legends which promote the myth of heroism. Marcos and Bové nonetheless are important figures in the anti-capitalist movement.

## Conclusions

Anti-capitalist symbolic expressions, explored in the previous chapter, play out, in imagery and carnival, themes of fun and pleasure, that connect with the ethos of the Situationist project and the anarchistic attitude. Seen, for example, on the Stop the War demonstration, London, 28 September 2002, are a line of people dressed as crows, marching in front of the samba band, Rhythms of Resistance. With crow heads and huge beaks, and wings of real black feathers, they symbolise death, as a critical statement against war, then being planned by the US against Iraq. Some of those dressed as crows wear suits underneath, to underline the role of bureaucrats and world leaders in war. Behind them are a row of dancers dressed in silver and black, and all around are others dancing. Two people wearing skeleton masks and black hoods carry a banner which proclaims, with a circle-A for anarchy, that 'All state is terrorist'.

The common thread connecting the projects discussed in Chapters 7-11 is a continuation of the Situationist project of negation, propounding a critique of the totality and of everyday life; a critique that runs deeper than the commonplace spectrum of oppositional ideas. From Turner's nihilism, to *Here and Now's* anti-anti perspectives, starting from zero; Vague's transgressive popular culture, Home's use of parody and irony; *Anarchy's* call for a ruthless critique of all ideas, including our own, to avoid surrendering our abilities to think for our selves to higher authorities and reified frameworks of thinking, to *Fifth Estate's* critique of civilization itself.

In exploring the anarchistic currents in which the Situationist legacy can be traced, I have aimed to convey something of their richness and a sense of their lived world, their ethos, the ideas that inform the oppositional impulse which underpins it, and the relationship to the past, in particular to the Situationists.

Anthropologists and sociologists alike could benefit from keeping in mind the old adage of Marx - that the point is not to understand the world but to change it. The anthropologist Karen Sacks writes that what attracted her to anthropology - its 'vision of social alternatives' - is absent in progressive anthropology today, which is beset rather by critique, 'of early ethnographies, of each other, of our own thoughts' (Sacks 1995 p 104). She emphasises the value of anthropology in analysing democratic alternatives, such as the political movement of indigenous peoples emerging around the globe, which the uprising in Chiapas put 'in everyone's face'. And she suggests that anthropologists could also turn their attention to grassroots movements, protest and prefigurative efforts 'in our own backyards', since 'If anything besides a bloodbath is to emerge from the collapse of states, we do need to understand and help bring forth viable alternatives to the status quo of the state' (ibid., p 105).

I would add that we can also turn our attention, as I have here, to the currents disseminating alternative ideas and networking communications, that inform and reflect on such grassroots movements, protest and prefigurative efforts in our own backyards<sup>1</sup> These form essential links between others, and inspirational evocations of an oppositional impulse. Returning to the water metaphor, texts and actions act as an important source in 'feeding' the course of anarchistic currents.

### **Texts as a focus for conveying the lived world and ethos of oppositional currents**

My focus on texts, and chapters organised around periodicals as projects, may lay this thesis open to the charge that I have neglected to convey enough of the lived world and experience of the currents explored, and as such have fallen prey to the same charge levelled, in Chapter 1, against studies in the field of new social movement theory, that they neglect to convey the lived experiential world of movements. On the other hand, I have also argued that it is the critical ideas and the oppositional impulse that form essential elements in the ethos of oppositional currents, which, as I argued, tends to be lost in many studies. It is the critical ideas, the response to and reaction against the world, that constitutes oppositional movements. The focus on texts in this thesis is important in that, through addressing summaries, quotations and debates written by participants, it allows the participants to speak for themselves, albeit in a framework of selection and contextualisation provided by me, more than would be the case if I were to aim for a more conventional ethnographic account of the milieux involved.

Conventional ethnography, it could be argued, was traditionally developed to study primarily oral cultures – that is small-scale 'primitive' societies or those marginalised, oppressed groups with little focus on writing about their experience, worldviews and perspectives.<sup>2</sup> As a method, it may need some reworking when directed towards currents whose ideas are theoretically informed, and many of the participants of which are schooled in the fields of discourse, theory and philosophy that constitute academia, such as is the case with many oppositional currents, including anarchism and related milieux.

The focus on texts in this thesis provides, therefore, a richer account of the critical ideas, formulated for communication, through print, in the public sphere and therefore provides a

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The field of 'anthropology at home' is one method by which such oppositional currents can be studied. Direct action movements in the 1990s have mainly been studied within a sociological framework (Wall 1999, Seel et al 2000) which tends to sideline the lived world and the rich source of ideas and dialogue of which independently published texts form a vital repository. Welsh (2000) includes a consideration of the importance of movement literature in the consolidation and maintenance of the UK anti-nuclear direct action movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s and includes material on anarchism. Welsh and Chesters (2001) and Chesters and Welsh (2001) focus on the summit demonstration in Prague, September 2000 and though analysed with reference to social movement theory both studies nonetheless have a rich and sensitive handle on the material.

And the focus on 'observation' in the term 'participant observation' surely reflects the traditional method of anthropology as conducted by those with a limited command of the language of their subjects. For further discussion on these issues, see the Appendix on methodology.

deeper, more accurate sense and understanding of the ethos, the oppositional impulse that is important in creating oppositional currents

The periodicals explored in Chapters 6-11 form an important source of the communications and dialogues informing anarchistic currents. These communications as texts are a primary focus of activity, and those discussed evince one characteristic of the Situationists, which was to formulate written critiques and to communicate these. As Debord wrote

‘Our concern is first of all to constitute a global critical theory and (therefore inseparably) to *communicate* it to all sectors already objectively engaged in a negation which remains subjectively fragmentary. The definition, the experimentation, the long and exacting labour around this question of *communication* is our real principal activity as an organised group.’ (Debord and Sanguinetti 1972/1974 p.117)

Though Debord’s reference to the ‘organised group’, and the attitude of intellectual vanguardism in his pronouncement, no longer resonates in contemporary anarchistic currents, the commitment to *communication* of critical theory continues to be a primary concern, and principal activity, of those involved. These communications, as texts, written and independently published, are vital manifestations of the impulse and ethos underpinning oppositional currents and their primary motivation which is to seek a radical transformation of the world.

The sense of community, mediated by texts, and the relationship to the past which affords a diachronic as well as synchronic dimension to this, is also formed through histories of moments of anarchistic expression, such as in the events of May 68 in France. The lived experience of participants of May 68, which is archived and documented in texts published by anarchist presses, are explored as an example of this relationship to the past as a source of inspiration and support, and a moment when the existing order was contested.

This radical critique is presented in Situationist texts, which were themselves influential in France in the 1960s. They seek to connect with a poetic language and a language of lived experience, aiming to arouse an emotional response in the reader (see Chapter 4). Vaneigem wrote:

‘And yet people still try to use words and signs to perfect their aborted gestures (those robbed of their substance by words which serve Power better than they do men). It is because they do that a poetic language exists: a language of lived experience which, for me, merges with radical theory, the theory which penetrates the masses and becomes a material force.’ (1983 p.75)

My discussion of the Situationists aims to evoke the use of poetic language and the language of lived experience which merges with radical theory and cites this poetic lyrical appeal as one source of the continued importance of Situationist texts in anarchistic currents and practices. This call to a poetic language of lived experience merged with radical theory, is exemplified in Vaneigem’s appeal to contacting other relations, as when for example he writes

‘But we only need to hold out our hands and touch one another, to raise our eyes and meet one another, and everything suddenly becomes near and far, as if by magic’ (1983 p.26)

This appears to prefigure the experience of May 68, described by participants as a moment of euphoria, contact and communication, in which the individual related to hundreds or thousands of others (see Chapter 3). The visionary and utopian writing which erupts in the wall writing at this time expresses this contestation of the existing order, and is explored in Chapter 3.

The language of lived experience is invoked at times in subsequent writings by those familiar with Situationist texts. Gray for example concludes his book *Leaving the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* with a moment of self-reflection, combining emotional candour with a desire to articulate something of his relationship with the existing world and the desire to transform it:

‘Look, after so many pages, let’s try to be honest, just for a moment. I feel very fucked up myself, and I know it’s my responsibility. Yet whenever I go out on the streets my being somehow reels back appalled: these terrible faces, these machines, they are me too, I know; yet somehow that’s not my fault. Everyone’s life is a switch between changing oneself and changing the world. Surely they must somehow be the same thing and a dynamic balance is possible. I think that the S.I. [Situationist International] had this for a while, and later they lost it. I want to find it again – that quickening in oneself and in others, that sudden happiness and beauty. It could connect, could come together. Psychoanalysis [sic] and Trotskyists are both silly old men to the child. Real life is elsewhere.’ (Gray 1974 p.167).

If poetic language is less in evidence in post-Situationist writing than in the Situationists, where it re-erupts it does so with more personal engagement, with a more populist and direct touch, and with a powerful invective, as when Mr Social Control writes, in a rant addressed to motorists:

“Where do you think oxygen comes from anyway? Out of your fucking exhaust pipe?” (6.3)

‘The holders of power are always beholden to power itself. In a world governed by stock prices the buck stops nowhere. It passes from Tokyo to London to New York and back again. Why should they care if the whole world is turned into a radiation soaked desert? If no human being can ever see the light of day? If we are reduced to drinking our own piss miles underground, dependent on them for every breath we take? (5.5) (Mr Social Control, c early 1990s, see Chapter 7).

If the poetic language is more absent in subsequent post-Situationist writings, the radical theory is present and develops dialogically, as Chapters 6-11 illustrate, in exploring the role played by texts in mediating a sense of a community of like-minded others. Texts as artefacts allow those with anarchistic perspectives to share experience, dialogue and contact in an alternative culture of resistance. Those, separated by distance, can connect with like-minded others through texts, a tions and through the internet. “Anarchists don’t need to know one another to think the same thing” were the words of a French man who was asked by a judge what anarchists he knew in Paris (quoted in Vaneigem 1983 p 76) (This quote also illustrates the autonomous quality of anarchistic ideas, which are not hampered by allegiance to an ideology, single thinker party or group).



The interplay of ideas as *dialogue* forming through the vehicle of the periodical is explored, and emerges most significantly in *Anti Clock-wise* and *Anarchy*, from which several debates are summarised and analysed. These debates also explore the part played by those who, through their interventions, become more prominent in anarchist and post-Situationist milieux. This is also clear from the discussions about the anarchist milieux in Chapter 2, and those on *Fifth Estate* in Chapter 11, which includes discussion on prominent figures in the American 'primitivist' scene, some of whom contributed to the debate on anarchy and the sacred discussed in Chapter 10.

These debates also contribute to an understanding of the intersections of anarchistic ideas with wider oppositional currents and more visible expressions of protest: in *Anti Clock-wise*, there are allusions to 1980s anti-fascist demonstrations and to the experience of the anti-Poll Tax campaign in Britain in 1990, by Turner and by Mathew respectively; *Here and Now* casts critical evaluation on the riots that erupted in cities around Britain in the early 1980s; *Anarchy* develops debate both on the role of the sacred that comes to the foreground with the growth of 'new age' and holistic therapies, and *Fifth Estate* explores themes highlighted by the rise of radical environmentalism in the late 1980s and 1990s; both periodicals, still in production in the early 00s, engage with anti-capitalist eruptions that come to the fore from 1999.

The importance of play and spontaneity, and the critique of orthodox politics and of the role of militant and sacrifice to the cause or party, is another theme traced from the Situationists to post-Situationist texts discussed.

The use of slogans, a concise propagandist communication is an important tradition which can be traced back to the Situationists, and which flowered in May 68 in the wall writing analysed in Chapter 3. The use of slogans is a tool of Class War, Turner, Vague and Home (see Chapters 2, 7 and 9) and continues to be important in anti-capitalist eruptions. A popular chant in Seattle in the demonstration which derailed the World Trade Organisation talks, November 1999 was 'CAPITALISM? NO THANKS! WE'LL BURN YOUR FUCKING BANKS!'; and seen in Genoa Port in the protests against the G8 summit, July 2001: 'YOU MAKE PLANS, WE MAKE HISTORY'

An element of didacticism – the critical evaluation of other anarchist perspectives or oppositional currents – plays a role in all the projects discussed. Bound up with this is a concern with differentiation from other circles. Though a sense of distinction and cultural capital, in Bourdieu's (1979) sense, forms one element in this differentiation, a more important motivation is the concern to evaluate other positions and practices and move beyond them. For example Turner differentiates his own commitment, to originality, spontaneity, humour, ridicule and an assault on everyday life from the approach of 'po-faced class struggle anarchists' devoid of spirit, creativity and new ideas' and also that of green lifestyle anarchists with their tendency towards single issue concerns and 'drippy search for personal nirvana' (see Chapter 7)

This illustrates the concern to define and evaluate different currents to make sense of them, learn from them and evolve new perspectives. The didactic element is also motivated by a desire to exert influence on the ideas and interventions of others; this is particularly explicit in *Here and Now*, in which the spectrum of oppositional currents, from animal rights to women's groups to anarchism, is subjected to critical evaluation.

In the case of *Anarchy*, the editor allows a dialogic development of positions and counter-positions to emerge from different contributors, often spanning many issues. Anarchist currents constitute themselves dynamically, interacting continually with wider manifestations from spiritual to environmental concerns. Debates on current issues, from the role of the sacred to deep ecology, are carried out in the pages of both American periodicals discussed, *Anarchy* and *Fifth Estate*, and are addressed in Chapters 10 and 11.

The interventions of Vague and Home incorporate popular cultural and parodic elements. Vague adopts a celebratory approach to phenomena ranging from the Situationists to transgressive projects. Home's relentlessly critical and sardonic style extends to a desire to parody and undermine other radical projects, including those of the Situationists whose project is the subject of Home's obsessive iconoclasm.

In all the projects discussed, the common ground to which is a familiarity with the Situationists, there is a strong relationship to the past as a resource for ideas, inspiration and a means of learning more on and evaluating radical perspectives and practices. Perspectives range from rescuing the Situationists from their Marxism, to rescuing them from the misinterpretations of new age speakers at anarchist gatherings. *Anarchy* editor argues that it is left to anarchists to 'disentangle the rotting threads of Marxist ideology from the rest of the living body of [Situationist] libertarian theory...Our turn to play!' (29 1991 p.15) Brubaker argues that the cooptation of the Situationist legacy into New Age personal growth negates everything the Situationists tried to accomplish, and loses their radical utopian vision. (*Fifth Estate* Winter 1990 pp.12)

An encounter with anarchist and Situationist ideas may allow an individual to make sense of their own experience and of the world and of class oppression. This is evoked most poignantly in Rick Turner's evocation of his family experience and growing awareness of class oppression (Chapter 7). Stewart Home is also explicit about his own experiences of a secondary modern school in playing a part in his own sense of anger towards high culture, the ruling class and the special fields of ex-public school boys.

Ideas, written and printed in the periodical as artefact, can become the means of contact with like-minded others, in Turner's case, his zines drew a large circle of international correspondents. Turner writes of the importance of the contact and shared experience involved in the zines.

‘The circulation of this mag is miniscule, but if what it is saying is of some use or has validity to those people fighting back now then hopefully at least the ideas may be disseminated in whatever ways are available via other media’ (*Anti Clock-wise* 4).

The US periodicals *Anarchy* and *Fifth Estate* continue to be produced in 2002 and to act as mediators of ideas, augmented and supported by internet communications, and Situationist texts continue to be influential, having more relevance than ever.

My analysis indicates the role of texts and periodicals as affording a sense of community over distance with like-minded others. This is not to say that more could not be done to increase this sense of community, particularly via more opportunities for face-to-face contact and interactions. The use of the internet, and of bulletin boards such as urban75, indicates a strong desire for contact with others with similar interests (during the events in Genoa, urban75 editor reported 300,000 people have logged onto urban75 alone), and the Internet, like the dialogues in periodicals, is no substitute for affinity groups. Attempts to create a network and local groups where none exist spontaneously, such as was the project of the Social Ecology Network, (see Chapter 12), tend to be unsuccessful or short-lived. Such projects are constrained by the lack of public space, the separation of like-minded others over distance, and the difficulty in transcending the limitations and internalised attitudes of Western civilization in its fragmentation of neighbourhood and communal forms. As pointed out in the article ‘Give up activism’ (Chapter 12), it may be that more sustained communities of like-minded others can form only when radical oppositional responses to the world gain a real resurgence.

As capitalism colonises every aspect of the lifeworld in its global penetration, radicals may turn to more guarded and limited appeals. This is suggested by one participant in the American periodical *Fifth Estate* when he speaks of

‘increasingly being forced into rearguard actions whose demands step away from the totality and sound more like “Please don’t kill everything so fast”’ (Peter Werbe, interview in *Alternative Press Review* Spring/Summer 1999 p.18)

Werbe sees his current task as one of preserving ideas which would otherwise be threatened with elimination:

‘We are at a critical point now trying to preserve those ideas which are at risk from being pushed from human consciousness [I see] our projects and journals as repositories of anti-authoritarian ideas that include an understanding that technology as manifested under industrial capitalism is a major factor in the domination of the human spirit’ (ibid.)

A primary motivation in all the projects of those in anarchistic currents is the desire to keep increasingly marginalised anti-authoritarian ideas alive and to communicate these within and

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<sup>3</sup> In May 2002 Rebel Press for example dispatched a further order of 1000 copies of Raoul Vaneigem’s *Revolution of Everyday Life* to AK distribution in San Francisco, USA (personal communication, Martin May 2002). Situationist ideas, published by an anarchist imprint (Rebel Press) and distributed by an anarchist book distribution service in Edinburgh and San Francisco. AK Distribution

beyond the networks of adherents, alongside their interventions in the struggles of our times which through non-hierarchical organisation and the spirit of a critique of capitalism, which can communicate anarchist ideas as well as enact anarchism in action.

I want to conclude by reconnecting with the elements of utopian and visionary writing that is kept alive in anarchistic writing and publishing, such that it maintains its potential, in Ong's terms, 'for being resurrected into limitless living contexts by a potentially infinite number of living readers' (Ong 1982 p 91). Vaneigem wrote, on the communication of radical theory.

'Radical theory comes out of the individual, out of being as subject: it penetrates the masses through what is most creative in each person, through subjectivity, through the desire for realization.' (1983 p.74)

My task has been to explore this creativity in humans, their potential to see through and beyond both the everyday taken-for-granted phenomena of modern life; through the ideologies which present it as normal, inevitable, and the result of 'progress'; and to grasp and communicate their critiques and alternative visions of the world.

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## **Appendix: Methodology and Primary Sources**

### **Introduction: an egalitarian and convivial research approach**

The notion of conviviality is one foregrounded by many of those involved in anarchistic currents, particularly those informed by Situationist ideas. It relates to the Situationist emphasis on recreating everyday life in the here and now and the anarchist stress on creating social relationships in the present that are non-hierarchical and mutual. See Chapter 8 for an account of the way in which the notion of conviviality in the here and now corresponded in two independent spheres. Ivan Illich, the writer on human-scale ways of life, can be credited with having gained attention for the notion in his book *Tools for Conviviality* (1973).<sup>1</sup>

In discussing my research method, I reversed the traditional anthropological method of 'participant observation' in order to emphasise the participation, carried out in an observant manner. The shift of emphasis to 'observant participation' helps to convey my desire for an encounter between persons on a dialogical basis – with me learning from them (though see below for the further emphasis on listening than observing).

As discussed in Chapter 1, I aimed for a means of relating to people, whom I contacted about my research, that created an encounter between persons rather than the role divisions imposed by interviewer/interviewee or academic and subject/object of study. Meetings were arranged either at my home or theirs, with the usual customs of hospitality, or in places, usually of the other person's suggestion, such as pubs or cafes. This allowed the meetings to be as convivial as possible, with the sociable aspect of refreshments. I am certain that most researchers, academic or journalistic, observe this conviviality, particularly if time allows this: I am merely making it explicit.

### **'Observant participation' and how I contacted people**

I began my research in 1988. I met, through a mutual friend, several people involved in a set of interventions based in art galleries (see the end of Chapter 6 for an account of one example of a gallery installation). The individuals in this circle intersected with a post-Situationist milieu, and included Stewart Home (see Chapter 9), Ed Baxter and Andrew Hopton, organisers of a publishing and distribution outfit for libertarian books, Simon Dickason, an architect, Stefan

Illich conceives of conviviality as autonomous relationships outside of the demands of industrial productivity. He writes,

'I choose the term 'conviviality' to designate the opposite of industrial productivity. I intend it to mean autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment, and this in contrast with the conditioned response of persons to the demands made upon them by others, and by a man-made environment. I consider conviviality to be independence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value.' (Illich 1973 p 11)

In addition to drawing on Illich's notion of conviviality, I also drew on anarchist ideals of non-hierarchy and on an awareness, derived from co-counselling and other humanistic psychotherapeutic practices, of the ideal of egalitarian social relations and interactions. I was familiar with, and sympathetic

Sczce kun, a writer, publisher and performance art t, and Glyn Banks and Hannah Vowles artists. I arranged to meet all these people between 1988 and 1990.

Stewart Home put me in touch with contacts closer to the anarchist movement the person behind the Dark Star imprint, and the organisers of the Anarchist Book Fair, all of whom I arranged to meet in 1990. They also put me in touch with the organiser of AK Press and Distribution, who visited me on two occasions when he was down from Edinburgh, selling books to London bookshops

Stewart Home also put me in touch with Tom Vague, who I met in 1989 and 1990, and two artists, Gabrielle Quinn in London and Jayne in Glasgow.

I contacted other people directly those involved with Here and Now, in Glasgow and Leeds, where I met them on several occasions (and two of those involved visited me in London in addition). Through my visits to Glasgow I also met Peter Kravitz, editor of the libertarian journal *New Edinburgh Review*, who I also met when he visited London. I contacted Rick Turner of Anti Clock-wise and corresponded by letter, before meeting up when he was visiting London. I also corresponded by letter, and later in the 1990s, by email, with the editor of the US magazine *Anarchy*, and met with him on his visit to London in 1994. Though I approached the US periodical *Fifth Estate* about corresponding with them, I received no response.

I met many others through my participation in the Anarchist Research Group, 1989-2001, which met in London four times a year. Through the group I met anarchists such as David Goodway, Richard Schofield, Tom Cahill, Martyn Everett, anarcho-primitivist writer John Moore, and numerous others.

From the start of my period of research and participation, I attended events in anarchist and related milieux that I found interesting, for personal as well as research reasons. These included book launches, book fairs, conferences, discussion groups, exhibitions, talks, performance readings, too numerous to list here. The listings in periodicals provided me with information about these, though I heard about some events directly from organisers or others in the milieu. I also wrote for the *Bulletin of Anarchist Research* 1988-1994 and thereafter for *Anarchist Studies*, as well as for newsletters such as that for the Social Ecology Network (1992).

From time to time my participation resulted in encounters with people who presented a new angle or milieu. For example, I met Sebastian Hayes, the participant in May 68 whose account is addressed in Chapter 3, when he gave a talk on May 68 and the Situationists for the Anarchist Research Group, January 1996. I subsequently met him on other occasions, such as when he gave further talks for the London Anarchist Forum, April 1997 and May 1998, and visited my house to talk further about May 68 and the Situationists in May 1998. As an illustration of relations of reciprocity that emerged through my thesis writing, he suggested that he do some (paid) gardening work for me in exchange for visiting my house with his comments on some

chapters of my thesis which I had sent him for feedback. He brought with him three articles which he had written after reading the chapters, and he left with me copies of these – on ‘Why was May 68 memorable?’, ‘Violence and May 68’ and ‘The Situationists’ I have not had the space in my thesis to address these and the conversations I had with Hayes, as much as I would have liked.

In another example of reciprocity, in May 2000, I met a radical archaeologist and anarcho-primitivist at a conference organised to coincide with May Day actions in London, and after exchanges of communication she offered to read some chapters of my thesis, in return for which I intend to read her thesis at a future date.

In the autumn of 2001 I began attending weekly meetings of Reclaim the Streets (RTS) in London. This was for personal reasons, since, in the regime of repression in the aftermath of ‘September 11’, which governments cynically exploited to bomb Afghanistan, curtail liberties, and obscure plans for further environmental domination, I felt the need for more regular guaranteed contact with a wider circle of like-minded people. I attended RTS meetings until the weekly meetings discontinued in April 2002., though an e-group still exists, and many RTS participants continue to be active in projects into which they had branched long before the weekly group meetings discontinued – from Peoples Global Action to the Wombles to the London Action and Resource Centre in Aldgate East to the Genetic Engineering Network to Hackney Not 4 Sale. This period of participation allowed me to develop a deeper sense of awareness of this sphere of anti-capitalism, and has informed my account of anti-capitalism and radical environmental currents in Chapter 12.

### **Being an observant, or listening, participant**

Though observation is an inevitable aspect of social interaction, listening and interacting are more important in learning from others. During my meetings with people, particularly those carried out in the period 1989-1991, I tape recorded the conversations, always with their permission, or made notes.

During social occasions, I made notes of interest afterwards, or, if the wording of a communication was particularly important or evocative, I made notes during the conversation, sometimes asking people to repeat a phrase to record it accurately

Approximately 60 hours of taped material, of conversations with 15 individuals, was recorded, and from these I made notes and, in some cases, transcribed conversations, depending on the density of relevant material. These encounters and conversations helped me to form a sense of the motivations and interests of individuals; allowed me to develop a nuanced and sensitive handle on interventions, and contributed to my growing understanding of the different strands of interventions. Where relevant to the focus of my thesis, I made some explicit references to points made during these taped conversations

It would be difficult to tease out precisely and quantitatively how my many years of participant experience, social contacts and these early taped conversations have informed my thesis. What began for me as an unfamiliar, mysterious but intriguing world of zines and other interventions, names and ideas, has developed over the years into a finer tuned awareness of the individuals, milieux and depth of critical ideas and debates. It is that awareness that has allowed me to write about the broader anarchist movement, the Situationists, and post-Situationist and anti-capitalist interventions, with more depth and sensitivity than would be possible had I during the course of three years read some Situationist histories, analysed some contemporary periodicals, and constructed from this a thesis. The awareness is manifest in the writing itself, and in the main themes of the thesis – the relationship with the past (the Situationists), the significance of May 68, the oppositional impulse arising not only on a cognitive but also on an emotional level. I gained over time a sense of history and the diachronic relationships and influences which individuals drew on in their projects – material which formed a counter to the somewhat ahistorical approach of some new social movement theorists such as Melucci (1989).

Undoubtedly there were negative aspects of my approach formed through the interaction of myself and my interests and the anarchistic milieu. As a result of knowing those about whom I was writing, I was more comfortable, for example, writing about texts that individuals had chosen to put in the public domain than in writing about interactions and observations formed through meetings and events. This has tended to result in my prioritising texts and therefore overly neglecting illustrations of the lived everyday interactions of the milieux concerned.

The issue of ‘immersion’ in the ‘research milieu’ – and the need for sufficient ‘distance’ from accumulated material to be able to write about it – is one that has been addressed in several texts (eg. Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Roseneil 1993). In my case, the term ‘immersion’ might be an exaggeration, since my level of participation was not akin to, for example, living in a protest site such as at Greenham Common peace camp or an anti-roads protest camp; what I experienced was a fairly typical engagement of one interested in anarchist ideas.

### **Primary material**

From 1988 I began collecting a wide range of texts from anarchist to Situationist, post-Situationist to primitivist. Initially my main sources for these were Compendium Bookshop, north London (which closed in the late 1990s), Freedom Bookshop in the city of London, and other libertarian/left outlets such as Housmans and Collets in central London, and the annual Anarchist Book Fair.

The material I collected included books, pamphlets and periodicals to flyers and leaflets. This corresponds to the activities of many anarchists who are not themselves involved in any official research (and many grumble that they do not have space for the large collections of material in cupboards and lofts that they are loathe to throw away; see also Chapters 2 and 3).



I read widely in order to absorb, over many years, the range of perspectives presented and the debates that emerged. I read as much to formulate my own ideas on social transformation as for research purposes, and, again, this corresponds with the interventions of an interested participant not engaged in formal research

The material in my collection is far too extensive to document here. The key periodicals discussed in my thesis are:

*Anarchy: a journal of desire armed* Columbia, MI, USA

*Anti Clockwise* and *No* 1989-1994 Liverpool, UK

*Fifth Estate* 1970s-2002 Detroit

*Here and Now* 1980s-1990s Glasgow and Leeds

*Smile* 1980s London

*Vague* 1980s-1990s London

Amongst the other periodicals which I read were, from north America, *Processed World*, *Kick it Over*, and from the UK, *Class War*, *Freedom*, *Solidarity*, *Leisure* and *Underground*, *Edinburgh Review*, *Do or Die*, *Aufheben*.

From the late 1990s, the internet provided another means of gaining information about events and debates: sites used included [www.schnws.org](http://www.schnws.org), [www.indynedia.org](http://www.indynedia.org), [www.corporatewatch.org](http://www.corporatewatch.org), [www.urban75.com](http://www.urban75.com), [www.infoshop.org](http://www.infoshop.org), [www.eco-action.org](http://www.eco-action.org), [www.primitivism.com](http://www.primitivism.com). Email lists such as ALLSORTS also provided information.

## Research ethics

My motivation for participating in anarchist currents arose primarily out of sympathy with and interest in the ideas, as is outlined in Chapter 1. My engagement in PhD thesis research was explicit, and certainly further structured and stimulated my motivation to make contact with others and learn more.

To consider the research ethics code of 'overt' and 'covert', my research was substantively 'overt', in the sense that I never attempted to hide the fact that I was engaged in research for a PhD thesis, and was explicit about this when arranging meetings with people. Since, however, my participation interwove a general engagement as much as a project of formal research, there were occasions, such as at some London Anarchist Forum meetings, when only a few people present knew of me and my research project; on such occasions I would not have introduced myself as a researcher before speaking since I was there on the same terms as others present as one engaged in debate on anarchist ideas.

The names used in my thesis are those in the public domain (ie in published texts). These include both real names (eg Rick Turner, Stewart Home, Mike Peters) and pen names (eg Alex Richards, Jim McFarlane, Tom Vague, Lev Chernyi/Jason McQuinn Sebastian Hayes).

In reference to material from conversations, or from contributions to public discussions by people known to me I used first names (eg Richard, Carol), except in the case of academics

whose names were in the public domain through published texts (eg. Tom Cahill, David Goodway, Brian Morris, John Moore, John Qua I). I was guided by a familiarity with the individual's own use or not of their name in connection to their interventions. For example those involved in organising the Anarchist Book Fair, Rebel Press and Dark Star use neither their own names nor pseudonyms in reference to these projects. Here I followed their lead and referred to the project and not the name of the individuals involved.

In the case of Chapters 3, 7, 8 and 10, I sent draft chapters to those involved in the projects (ie. Sebastian Hayes (as a participant in May 68); Rick Turner; Alex Richards; and other members of *Here and Now*; and Jason McQuinn respectively). They provided me with comments and feedback on details which I took on board in revising the drafts.

In the case of Chapter 9, I based interview material from Stewart Home on a published interview in *Variant* (7, 1989), which I had originally sent Home himself before publication and which he had revised. The original draft included sections of interview material faithfully transcribed, verbatim, from taped conversations. Home modified the wording fairly extensively mostly in terms of style than content. Though I preferred the original, which had a more engaging personal turn of phrase, I deferred to his revised version, and, in deference to his right to change what he had said for the public domain, I drew on the published version rather than on the original transcripts when writing Chapter 9.

### Issues raised

I selected material on the basis of its relevance to my agenda and the main themes of my thesis – the influence of the Situationists, on the lived world of anarchism, and on contemporary post-Situationist projects. This was my explicit agenda. I aimed through my account and analyses to convey what it was that contributed to the relevance and interest of every project and event discussed.

I have not met with disagreement from those involved about the basis of my agenda and interpretation of history. In other words, there appears to be general agreement about the importance of the Situationists; the recognition by many anarchists of the importance of keeping Situationist ideas alive; and the influence of the Situationists on the projects I selected for analysis. My aim was not to uncover hidden structures that generate action, but to trace a history of the Situationists and their legacy amongst anarchists and related projects. Anarchism is not a dogma but a self-reflexive process, and my thesis engages with that process of reflecting on the history of influences.

In the chapters on post-Situationist projects, I have drawn out different approaches to the Situationists and to other factors that each project threw up. I attempted to remain a less partial observer than some of those I met. For example, I encountered, particularly from Stewart Home and, to a lesser extent, from those involved in *Here and Now*, a denouncement of 'pro-Situs', who are seen to be uncritical followers of the Situationists. Though I documented these

perspectives in Chapters 6 and 8, I did not allow this to influence my own judgement of such projects, which seem to me valid contributions to the dissemination of ideas, engaged as they are in translating certain Situationist texts (BM Chronos) and writing Situationist-influenced tracts on current developments (BM Blob, BM Combustion).

Chapter 6 articulates some of the different perspectives by participants on the value of Situationist ideas. These varied from scathing critique to faithful dissemination, but generally both with equal ardour. I attempted to remain partial and to excavate the range of attitudes and pronouncements. The differences were addressed, and did not undermine my own explicit agenda or interpretation of history.

### Selecting material

I selected material which was relevant to my agenda and purpose in this thesis. My starting point was the way in which the past in such anarchistic currents provided both a tradition of ideas and practices which informed further generations, and also provided a resource from which to be inspired and to learn.

Early on I narrowed the field of focus in my thesis research and writing to a set of interventions which offered an incisive critique of the world, combined with critical self-reflection. It was clear that a common factor linking these projects was a familiarity with the Situationist project.

Anarchism formed an important backdrop in terms of milieu and publishing and distribution networks. I set out to include an ethnographically oriented account of this wider milieu and points of contact. I selected events such as the annual Anarchist Book Fair, and the festival Anarchy in the UK (1994). I also included material from conversations with anarchists and others, for example on how they discovered anarchist ideas.

I was guided always in my selection of material by the main themes of my thesis. I kept research notes and diaries, and, when writing up the final drafts in the period 1995-2000, I drew on many years of experience and participation, choosing material that illustrated my arguments and/or conveyed a deeper and more ethnographically oriented understanding. I prioritised my own experience as an 'observant participant' when writing accounts of events. I was more comfortable analysing material in the public domain i.e. published texts since these formed the public communications of individuals and provided a deeper understanding of the ideas, practices and motivations informing those involved.

As I explored further and fine-tuned my research approach in the early 1990s, I began to discover what seemed to me shortcomings in the existing academic literature on oppositional currents which tended to neglect their diachronic dimensions – their emergence out of past ideas, groups and practices, and their use of the projects in informing and inspiring their own.

### **Postscript: if you do research, do it for fun**

This is an amended version of a postscript to the text *On the poverty of student life*, written by members of the Situationist International and students of Strasbourg University (see Chapter 3). The postscript of this text is 'If you make a revolution, do it for fun'.

It conveys another aspect of the notion of 'conviviality' that creating convivial relationships and experiences in the here and now is also enjoyable. Again, I am certain that many researchers and academics experience this, and what I am advocating here is making that element explicit.

With everyone I met I enjoyed the pleasure of conversing with them. Some of those I met became longstanding friends. Sometimes an encounter was particularly memorable, often as a result of a set of chance circumstances. For example, I recall an occasion when I met Sebastian Hayes, in the company of an anarchist, Richard, for a meal prior to a talk on 'What is to be done?' that Hayes was to give for the London Anarchist Forum, April 1997. We walked for a long way, with Hayes wheeling his old black bicycle with a wicker basket on the handlebars, to find a suitable eating establishment that still retained the values of conviviality that we deemed suitable (no big plate glass windows or metal tubular chairs and tables, such as have become the expression and constitution of advanced consumer capitalist urban lifestyle promoting high-speed fast or fusion food, and which we therefore rejected on political, convivial and aesthetic grounds). We settled on an Italian trattoria whose interior had not been redone since the 1970s – all wood benches and defensible space. Later we found some hilarity in trying to find a suitable safe place to park Hayes' bike inside Conway Hall, the libertarian venue, where the talk was to take place. We then had difficulty finding the right room. We opened one door to find a large hall packed with Chinese men wearing identical grey suits. They all looked up and smiled at us. We then made our way upstairs, to the sound of flamenco music, and exchanged smiles with several young women, beautifully dressed in flamenco-style costume, who were making their way to their flamenco class. It was a rather surreal moment, but mixed with amusement and pleasure, and is one example of the enjoyment I derived from my encounters, when the human side of modern urban life emerged – anarchists, Chinese men, flamenco women converging to the strains of flamenco music.

### **A note on the time period involved**

It will be evident that the period of participation and research which informed this thesis spans many years – from 1988 to 2002. This allowed me to develop a deeper and richer awareness of the currents in which I was engaged.

One factor involved in the extended period of my thesis research and writing period was connected to the intersection of my own engagement and my research interests. The extended period helped me form sufficient critical distance to write academically on the projects of milieus with which my personal engagement interwove.

Aside from family and work commitments, it was also partly the difficulty in finding theoretical material that supported my perspectives that resulted in my producing several drafts before I was satisfied with the structure and chapters. In Chapter 1 I have reviewed a range of texts in the field of 'new social movement' theory and in anthropology, in order to clarify my own perspectives and my search for terminology and a language which did not distort or overlay the material and the milieu I wanted to write about. As one example of the way in which language and terminology influences the relationship between researcher and material, the tendency amongst writers in the field of new social movement theory is to refer to 'movement texts' – early a shorthand for the texts produced by participants in oppositional movements, and often independently published. From my perspective, the use of the term 'movement texts' tends to be rather reductive and to obscure an understanding of the discursive fields, social relations, richness of ideas and the desire to communicate them, that are aspects of the living current and world in which texts are produced. Another related aspect is my own relationship with the people about whom I wanted to write. Just as I was unwilling to distort what they did by finding categories on which to hang it, so too were some of them reluctant to be, as Richard put it, 'trotted out as some case study' (personal communication 1989).

While taking so many years to produce a finished thesis is not to be encouraged, and some institutions observe strict time limits which will need to be adhered to, it nonetheless demonstrates that persistence can be beneficial, and that a thesis, or at least a written account, can be a satisfying experience to complete.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> - And here, the phrase reworded for this postscript could be reworded again 'If you write a thesis, do it for fun .

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